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MOURAD, THE MAMELUKE; or, THE THREE SWORDMASTERS.

A TALE OF THE GRAND ARMY.

BY COL. THOMAS HOYER MONSTERY,

CHAMPION-AT-ARMS OF THE TWO AMERICAS.

AUTHOR OF "IRON WHIST, THE SWORDMASTER," "THE DEMON DUELIST," "THE CZAR SPY," ETC., ETC., ETC.



"SPLENDIDLY DONE! THAT'S THE TRICK!" HE LOOKED AT THE COMBAT WITH THE EYE OF A MASTER OF THE SWORD.

Mourad, the Mameluke;

OR,

The Three Swordmasters.

A TALE OF THE GRAND ARMY.

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CHAPTER I.

A LITTLE AFFAIR OF HONOR IS BEGUN.

THE great bazaar at Alexandria was all astir with an incessant clatter of tongues, so different from its ordinary sleepy quiet, that one might know something unusual had happened.

Strange and unaccustomed figures were bustling about among the grave, bearded merchants, who sat in their little holes in the wall, called shops, smoking long chibouques or longer waterpipes, wrapped in robes and gay shawls.

The strangers were trussed up in tight blue coats with brass buttons, that looked absurd to Oriental eyes; and they wore black stocks, three-cornered hats with cockades, tight breeches and gaiters, and had their hair clubbed into pig-tails that were all the same color—a light gray.

Such queer people the sober Turks and Copts had never seen before 1798.

"God is great!" piously remarked Haleb Effendi, the coffee-merchant, to his next neighbor, Naib, the fig-seller; "the Franks have sent us an army of old men with young faces, for they all have gray hair."

"You are an untraveled fool, who has no knowledge of the world," was the polite reply of Naib, who had once been on a trip to Malta, and was therefore an authority on Frankish customs. "Their hair is all sorts of colors, but they cover it up with grease and flour, on account of the order of their chief, who wants them all to look alike. Do you not see that they have shaven their faces so as to look like boys? These Franks are the sons of the devil. God is merciful!"

Haleb said nothing, for at that moment a little weazened old Frank, in tight black clothes, with a face seamed with wrinkles like a withered apple, stopped in front of the shop of Isa, the shawl merchant, who sat on the other side the bazaar, and they heard him say, in very good Arabic:

"How much do you ask for this shawl, my friend? Peace be unto you!"

"Unto you, peace; three thousand piastres," was the indifferent reply of Isa, who scorned to show astonishment at hearing a Frank talk Arabic with a fair accent.

The old man turned to his companion who had a gold epaulet on one shoulder and a sword by his side, and remarked in French:

"I told you how it would be, Lafangere. He asks seven hundred and fifty francs for what he will sell in the end for two hundred and fifty. If you want to study Eastern manners and customs, this is the place to do it in."

The officer addressed laughed and said:

"Thanks, my dear professor, but I have no wish to become an Orientalist like you. I only know that this bazaar smells most abominably, and that I wish we had never left Paris to hunt empty dreams in this ridiculous place they call Egypt. I don't want the shawls; but I do want a cup of this coffee they brag about so much. Let us go on to the *cafe*; I confess I prefer France to the Orient as far as I have seen it."

They were but drops in the stream; units of the French army of Egypt, just landed under the distinguished young General Bonaparte, and they strolled on out of the bazaar toward the grand *cafe* kept by Demetrius Peristaltikos, the Greek, where people talked French and where the place was crowded with officers.

The professor was an Orientalist who had ruined his eyes over Arabic and Persian manuscript and wore spectacles; the officer, as one could see by his uniform, was *maitre d'armes* or swordmaster of a dragoon regiment, as yet unprovided with horses.

They took their seats, *savant* and swordmaster, in the pleasant court of the *cafe*, looking out into the old port, beyond which they could see the blue Mediterranean ruffled by a fair breeze, with a huge eighty-gun ship—the *Guillaume Tell*—firing a salute as she passed the admiral's vessel, which lay at anchor with the rest of the fleet.

Everything that way was full of life and animation, with men-of-war and transports coming to anchor or shifting from the new port to the old, the water covered with small boats, the shore with wagons, camels, donkeys and any thing that could carry or draw a load to assist in disembarking the stores of the army.

"I think this Egypt, on the contrary, a very nice place," observed Professor Blot to his companion. "We have all we want to eat and drink, a glorious climate and the riches of the

East before us, when we get to Cairo. What would you have?"

"Paris," replied Lafangere, laconically. "It is the only place in the world. One can have an assault every day there, and here they are barbarians who use clubs and maces and never saw a foil in their lives."

"I crave the master's pardon," said a bland voice close to Lafangere; "but I think that he lies under a mistake. He can get all the assault he wants and he will find the Mamelukes very hard nuts to crack."

Lafangere looked haughtily around. He was a young man, short in stature, but very compact and muscular, and his dark face and brilliant black eyes showed him to be a Gascon by birth in all probability.

He beheld before him a singularly handsome young man, darker than himself, who wore raven black hair, without powder, in flowing curls to his shoulders, and had the uniform of the Guides, a body-guard to young General Bonaparte, instituted by him in Italy two years before.

The swordmaster measured the other from head to foot with a stare of arrogance such as he was wont to practice when coaxing a duel out of a stranger, and observed with ironical politeness:

"Monsieur is possibly a judge in these matters. He may even be some great master of the sword in disguise, for all I know."

"Nothing of the sort—only Emil St. George, sergeant of the general's escort, at your service," was the quiet reply. "But you were lamenting that you would have no affairs in Egypt. On the contrary, I think you can have all you wish, perhaps more."

"The expression 'perhaps more' is one that I cannot permit from a sergeant," interposed Lafangere, with severity. "You do not know, perhaps, who I am; Lafangere, at your service. You will of course withdraw your offensive remark."

St. George permitted a lazy smile to disturb his handsome mouth.

"I don't see why I should. It will be an honor for a simple sergeant of Guides to cross swords with a master like yourself, and I am young enough to afford to take a lesson. Besides I have always maintained that your system is a false one; that you do not know how to fence."

Lafangere started as if he had been stung and his swarthy face flushed crimson.

"I'll show you, this evening at sunset, on the sands by the Aboukir wall," he said in a low tone, "if you are in earnest."

St. George yawned slightly.

"I'll be there," he said in the same low tone. Then he continued calmly:

"People think because we are one army in the midst of enemies that we shall have no affairs among ourselves, but I am ready to wager a month's pay that before we get to Cairo, our people will be so ill-tempered they'll be quarreling and ready to cut each other's throats, while such gentlemen as you, Monsieur le Professeur, will be cursed high and low."

The old professor smiled good naturedly. He knew the remark was not made in malice.

"I think you are right, my friend," he answered. "There is no state of mind so prone to ill-temper as ignorance, and our men know as much about Egypt as I do about the inhabitants of the moon. They think that the sands are full of gold and that bottles of wine hang on the trees, whereas they will find very little to eat but raw wheat and beans, mills being unknown nearer than Cairo. You are right, my friend. Have you ever been here before?"

"No more than you," replied St. George; "but, like you I read, and I remember what a hard road St. Louis of France* found it to Jerusalem four centuries ago. Our fencing friend has heard of Saint Louis?"

Again Lafangere colored angrily. This plain sergeant was obviously making fun of him—him, the renowned swordmaster, inventor of the famous *coup d'arret* or stop-thrust—because he had neglected the rest of his education while learning to fence.

"Of course I know who Saint Louis was," he retorted, fiercely, "and I may be able to teach you, who are so proud of your history, a lesson you never learned before—how to keep your tongue still when it becomes impertinent."

But the annoying sergeant didn't seem to be in the least alarmed by the menace, for he went on as calmly as ever:

"History is a great consoler in captivity. I read the whole of the history of the last crusade once when I was under arrest for my affair with Miratori."

Lafangere's face altered, and he appeared to become attentive all at once. With an education strictly confined to carte and tierce, with recreation devoted to wine, ladies and dice, he yet knew every fencing-master in Europe, past and present, and the name of Miratori was that of a great Italian swordsman, who had been killed in a duel at Venice while he, Lafangere,

* Saint Louis was more properly King Louis the Ninth of France, who led the last crusade to the East and was made prisoner by the Turks and was only released for a heavy ransom.

was in Holland. He had never been able to get the particulars of the duel before, and here was a man who claimed to have been in it.

"Did monsieur have an affair with Miratori, the master of Venice?" he asked, more respectfully.

St. George yawned and took a suck at the long water-pipe brought him by a negro slave of the *cafe* before answering:

"A trifle. It cost me three months in the *salle de la police*, and I missed the great spectacle at Paris, where the general was received by the Directory. But he is a regular devil, that little Bonaparte, if he catches a man in an affair where he kills or disables another. I think he likes me—he ought to, for I saved him twice from the Austrians when he was not as great a man as he now is—only plain little General Bonaparte, the ill-tempered Corsican officer, always grumbling; but he doesn't care about saving lives if he catches a man in a duel."

"But," persisted Lafangere with great sweetness, "monsieur was saying he killed Miratori. May I ask how, if monsieur does not object to telling?"

St. George laughed slightly.

"Upon my word that is a modest request, when we are to try it in the evening. Do you wish to know my points in advance?"

Lafangere blushed.

"No, no, monsieur, I hope you do not think I could be guilty—"

"You are a Gascon and they all know how to skin their neighbor's sheep by mistake if they find them astray," retorted St. George sarcastically; "but I will tell you, if you will promise not to tell any one else. I ran him through the body under the right nipple, entirely in consequence of his trying the *coup d'arret* on me. That is why I say I think you don't know how to fence, Monsieur de Lafangere, for I understand that is your trick of all tricks."

The Gascon colored again and bit his lip. There was something in the quiet impudence of this handsome young man, who was not even a commissioned officer, that exasperated him and at the same time shook his nerve.

So much was this the case that at last he dropped the conversation and went away, leaving St. George and Professor Blot alone in the *cafe*.

CHAPTER II.

THE AFFAIR IS CONCLUDED.

WHEN Lafangere had gone out, the wrinkled old professor turned to his young companion and asked him seriously:

"Are you really going to fight this master? It will be no shame for you to decline an affair with him for he is a professional, you know."

"Perhaps I am one too," answered St. George lightly. "I am flattered by your concern, Monsieur le Professeur, but if you like to come to the field this evening, I will show you it is needless."

"Who? I?" ejaculated Mr. Blot astounded. "I attend a duel! But pardon, my friend, I am a noncombatant. I am only attending this expedition by invitation of the general, to collect Arabic manuscripts. It would be out of place."

"Never mind," answered St. George in a tone of indifference. "I thought you might like to see the fun. That's all. I do not press you. By the by I take a great interest in these Arabs myself and if you have no objection I should like your help in learning their language."

"You certainly are a most extraordinary young man," said the old professor dryly. "I think I may safely say there is not another sergeant in the army that has any ambition to become an Orientalist. I will help you with pleasure, when you wish. May I ask you a little question?"

"Certainly, monsieur."

But for all the gracious permission, St. George's face changed slightly, and the change deepened as Blot asked:

"What part of France do you come from?"

"None. I am a creole," was the reply, with a certain accent of bitterness that Blot could not understand.

"Ah, indeed, then you should be sure of promotion," said the professor gayly; "for our young general, they say, loves the creoles, since he married Madame Beauharnais.* You should make your court there and you are sure of a commission."

St. George curled his lip in a bitter smile.

"On the contrary, Madame Bonaparte would never say a word in my favor and would esteem it a disgrace to touch my hand."

Blot stared.

"Why, why? Surely you mistake. I know madame well, and she is the kindest of women to all."

"To all of her kind—yes—but I—tell it if you please, monsieur, I cannot help my birth—I am a half-blood. Do you know what that means in the West Indies? Do you know that we—we

* Josephine Tascher de la Pagerie, afterward Empress of France, was, as most people know, a creole, born in Martinique, first married to M. de Beauharnais, who was guillotined during the Revolution, afterward to General Bonaparte.

who look the same as the rest of you—who are not so dark as that Gascon bully I am to meet to-night—that we have no rights a white man need respect, because there lurks in our veins one little drop of the blood of the people of this continent! You wonder why I am to fight this Gascon to-night, monsieur? I will tell you. It is to show him that a half-blood can beat a pure-blood, and because he is the best fencer in this army."

The old professor was wiping his glasses with a pursing of the lips that told he did not like the other's words.

"My young friend," he observed dryly, "I think you are unduly sensitive. Since the Revolution we in France care nothing for blood. Deeds are everything. You are about to kill, if you can, another man on account of his race, because you think he despises yours, and you are quite wrong. I know Lafangere, and though he is a vain man of little education, he is no fool. But you will find your mistakes some day. In the mean time I will ask liberty to change my mind, and I will come to the field this evening. I hope you will not try to kill each other."

St. George smiled.

"That is not necessary, but I must give him a lesson. You think I am cruel, monsieur. Wait till you have been brought up, as I was, a slave—petted and indulged, no doubt, but knowing that my father might sell my mother and me whenever he took a whim to it. You would learn then why it is I hate the race of my oppressors."

"But we have no slaves now," persisted the old *savant*. "You forget the Revolution."

"No," answered St. George, bitterly, "no slaves; only the slave taint. And Madame Bonaparte is a creole, as you say. Therefore, I am only a sergeant, though, as you see, I have an education better than that of your friend, Lafangere, who sports the epaulet on his shoulder."

The old *savant* shrugged his shoulders. He saw it was no use to argue with this man, imbibed by the injustice of a false system, so he said nothing, and soon after left the *café*.

When evening arrived, he repaired to the extremity of Alexandria, where the old Arab wall had once separated the town from the peninsula of Aboukir, and where the sand came right up against the ruins. Here he found Lafangere, with two officers of his regiment and a sword-case, walking nervously up and down, waiting the arrival of his adversary.

As soon as the three saw the old *savant* coming they hid the sword-case, and affected to be examining some agates in the sand, but the professor set them at ease by remarking:

"Never mind me, gentlemen. I come by invitation merely as a spectator, and would not disturb your pious duty of cutting one another's throats for the world. It is truly a curious thing to an old man like me that three vigorous young men in the service of our common mother, France, should come out here and hide behind a wall for the purpose of putting each other into the hospital. But here, I see, comes Monsieur St. George, and I hope you will get through your business in time to get back to tattoo roll-call."

The officers looked uneasy under his open raillery; but they did not resent it, for at that moment the slender, graceful figure of St. George, in his hussar uniform, came strolling along under the walls, followed by three soldiers of the Guides with their long sabers; and the light was too precious to be wasted in disputes.

There was a good deal of stiffness in the salutes of the officers; for they didn't like to be compromised in an affair with enlisted men; but, under the republic, discipline, so far as etiquette went, was much relaxed in the French army, and duels between *maitres d'armes*—who were in the lowest of commissioned grades—and sergeants were not regarded as out of place.

St. George waived the privilege of choosing sabers and cheerfully accepted the slender swords of his adversary.

He even paid him a compliment, observing:

"If I am to take a lesson from the first swordsman in France, let it be with the weapon he has made famous with the stop thrust."

The men were placed opposite to each other, the swords clashed and both leaped back in a moment out of measure. Then one might see the difference of their schools as St. George laid his sword and hand on his right knee and watched his antagonist, who assumed the old-fashioned fencing attitude with the left hand raised in a supposed balance, his sword hand extended. The one was resting and waiting, the other working before he made a step.

Presently Lafangere lunged, feinted, and made a prolonged attack on St. George, who kept leaping back, doing very little parrying, till the master's sword executed a straight lunge in *carte*, when the creole made a circular sweep of his sword in prime, carrying the opposing blade with it and aiding in a straight thrust in *carte* that compelled Lafangere in his turn to retreat.

The swordmaster stamped his foot angrily.

"Come on, then," he said between his teeth. "Let's see if you can attack."

In a moment St. George was on him, plying him with thrust on thrust, till Lafangere found the opportunity he coveted to execute his famous "stop thrust." The stop thrust is a very simple thing in itself and depends entirely on what is known as the "upper attack."

If one man lunges at another, and the second, instead of parrying, thrusts back, the one who thrusts at the upper part of the body is sure to hit first, because that part is nearest to the enemy.

St. George made a low thrust at Lafangere, and the swordmaster instantly thrust back at his enemy's throat.

With a sudden stoop the creole dropped on his left knee and hand, with point up. Lafangere's sword ripped up the collar of his jacket, but St. George's blade took the swordmaster full in the right breast under the nipple, and had not the creole at the same moment drawn back his hand would have spitted the other like a lark. As it was, Lafangere leaped back with a cry of pain, leaving his sword entangled in the other's collar, and pressing both hands to his breast, exclaimed:

"Ah, mon Dieu, he has done it as he said he would. I am killed!"

St. George had risen and was cleaning the point of the sword in the sand.

"You are mistaken, monsieur," he said coldly. "I have not served you as I did Miratori. The blade went in less than one inch. You will only lose a little blood, and be more careful in future. You see that the *coup d'arrêt* is not the whole of fencing."

Lafangere was in fact only slightly wounded, but he was completely subdued, and the real frankness and courage of his nature came out in the way he took his defeat.

"Monsieur St. George," he said to the creole, "you fence better than I, and it is I who have taken the lesson, not you. Still, I warn you, that cannot be done twice to me, and there is only one way in which we can avoid killing each other the next time we meet."

"And what is that?" asked St. George.

"By becoming fast friends, if you will honor me so far," was the fencing master's reply. "As enemies we are nothing, as friends we can do anything, even kill one of these Mamelukes, who are such terrible fellows they say."

St. George smiled and gave the other his hand.

"I believe you are a good fellow, after all," he said, whereat M. Blot hurried up, crying:

"I told you so, young man. I told you he was no fool. Upon my word now, I am glad this has ended thus. Lafangere, you must come home now, or you'll have a fever from loss of blood."

And the reunited combatants were about to embrace each other when—whiz! came a carbine bullet close to them into the sand, and the next moment with a loud yell of triumph, down rushed a squad of wild ragged Arabs on their lean ponies, headed by a Mameluke, blazing with gold and steel, and mounted on a bay mare that seemed fairly to fly.

How they had got there no one could tell, though they had heard of the audacity of the Mameluke scouts, but there was no time to lose.

The whole French party, headed by Professor Blot, took to their heels as hard as they could go, running to the ruined gate of the old wall and shouting for help, when the guard hastily turned out and fired a scattering volley at the Arabs, which sent them to the right about and saved Professor Blot, who was almost overtaken.

The brilliant Mameluke, however, was not to be frightened so easily, and he dashed up to the very gate, intercepting one of the dragoon officers who had come out with Lafangere.

The belated one drew his sword and aimed a blow at the Mameluke, who took it on his left arm with a clang that told he wore armor under his rich garments, and retaliated with a slash across the other's face, made apparently with little effort. Lafangere, who had turned at the gate, uttered a cry of horror.

The Mameluke's saber, with its sharp sickle edge, had sliced off the Frenchman's head at the mouth as if it had been a carrot.

The next moment St. George, with a cry of fury, was running after the Mameluke—as the latter, apparently satisfied, wheeled his mare to flee, and before the beast could start had dealt her a fierce blow, which cut the hamstring and crippled her.

The Mameluke uttered a savage curse of "Ya Allah!" and dashed in his sharp stirrup irons, causing the poor creature to gallop off on three legs, but as soon as he had got a hundred yards off he turned and uttered such a profusion of maledictions, shaking his saber, that it was clear he was defying the Frenchman to fight. In a moment St. George ran out with his own long saber, and waved it.

The Mameluke understood the signal and leaped off his mare, when he again shook his saber, as if to say:

"Come here, if you dare."

The soldiers at the gate called warningly to

St. George not to go; but he went on and in another moment had met the Mameluke single-handed.

The soldiers of the guard were afraid to fire for fear of hurting their own man, and a singular combat commenced, in which the Mameluke, a large powerful man, made huge sweeping cuts at St. George, while the latter stood on the defensive, not daring to cut back for fear the other might get a chance to deal him a slash.

In another moment the Frenchmen at the gate gave a wild shout.

They saw St. George beat up the Mameluke's sword, catch him by the wrist with his left hand, and in the same moment drive his saber through the throat of the Turk, so that he fell dead.

And then came a clatter of hoofs and scabbards in the street and up rode a small pale man in a general's uniform, followed by a brilliant staff, who halted and asked:

"What the deuce is all this? Do you not know the orders?"

CHAPTER III.

A NIGHT EXPEDITION.

THREE weeks later, the French army, covered with dust, lay in bivouac in the midst of enormous wheat fields at the edge of the desert, with the gigantic forms of the Pyramids looming from the sand far ahead of them.

The great red disk of the moon, rising in the East, was obscured by the smoke of fires along the banks of the Nile, and the soldiers knew that the whole army of the Mamelukes lay in front of Cairo to dispute their possession of Egypt.

The French were much dispirited by the hot weather and the apparent poverty of the country through which they passed. In the midst of thousands of acres of wheat they had no bread, because there was not a mill in the country; and they had to feed on beans and wild watermelons, a diet which caused much grumbling. In all their march they had not found a town or a decent house. Nothing but mud-walled hovels, inhabited by ragged Egyptians, who had nothing to sell because the Mamelukes had taken all in taxes.

Around them on the march hovered bands of Arabs on lean ponies, who hid behind the sand-hills or in dry canals, and cut off the stragglers mercilessly.

Lafangere, longing for Paris, was now only one of a crowd of officers, who kept up an incessant grumbling and wished they were back in Italy.

In the midst of the dry dusty bivouac, where the yellow clouds hung thickest, burned a little fire of dry sticks; and a small slender figure, in the uniform of a general of the French Republic, could be seen standing with his hands behind his back, his head slightly bent in an attitude of meditation, while groups of staff officers lay or sat around, talking in low tones.

St. George, who had gone over to the bivouac of his new friend Lafangere, hearing the latter grumbling, remarked:

"You are no worse off than the general. See how patient he is. He has not mounted his horse all day. And see Cafarelli, the engineer, a cripple; yet he has walked all day on his wooden leg."

"He doesn't care," retorted Lafangere in a tone of raillery. "He has one leg in France anyhow."

Whereat the others laughed, and one of the donkeys, tethered close by, for the use of the scientific men accompanying the army, brayed loudly.

Lafangere turned to his friends.

"Listen to the *savant*: he is telling us all he knows about Egypt."

And the joke, poor as it was, restored them to good-humor, so variable are the tempers of soldiers on campaign.

"I wonder what they are doing over there," remarked St. George, musingly, to his friend Lafangere, looking over at the dusky line of smoke that marked the camp of the Mamelukes. "If I had a friend or two to accompany me I would take a little trip over there."

"Thank you for nothing," retorted the fencing-master; "but, besides being dangerous, it is against orders to go outside the pickets."

"Nevertheless," persisted St. George, in a low tone, "I know a way to distinguish ourselves—you and I—if you dare try it. Come and take a little walk with me and I'll tell you."

The Gascon rose, for he had acquired a great respect for his companion since the latter's victory over himself and the Mameluke, and they strolled through the camp till they came to the outskirts and beheld the fire of the grand guard reserve about a hundred yards out on the sand.

Here they stopped and Lafangere said rather nervously:

"No further. Those cursed Arabs may be round. Tell me your wonderful plan."

St. George nodded.

"I will. You know we Guides are near the person of the general and hear a good deal of what passes."

"Naturally. Go on."

"To-night I heard him say something."

"Indeed? What was it?"

"He said to Cafarelli, 'it would be well worth promotion to any man who could find out for me whether those Mamelukes have any field artillery; but I can't order any one out, the risk is too great.'"

"Indeed! And what did you do?"

"I stepped up and saluted and I said to him: 'My general, if you will excuse me from guard duty to-night I will go,' and he gave me one of his sharp looks and asked: 'Who are you?' I stood up like a stake and answered: 'St. George, sergeant of Guides.' He turned his back on me and walked away as if he was thinking. Then he came back and said: 'Have you a horse?' 'No, general,' I said, 'he has had a wounded man on him all day.' 'You can take mine,' he answered: 'he has not been ridden all day.' You know the general walked."

"Well," observed Lafangere, dryly; "why do you tell me this? I have no horse."

St. George laughed.

"Do you remember the general's first order to the army of Italy?"

"No," answered the master still more dryly.

"I was in Holland with Pichegru. I know nothing of your army of Italy."

"You needn't sneer, my little man. The soldiers of Italy don't deserve it. But I will tell you about that order. It said: 'Soldiers, you need everything, and the enemy has it. You must take it from him. You can, if you have courage.'"

"And I suppose that I am to find a horse in the camp of the Mamelukes—is that what you mean? Thank you. I prefer to wait till we have beaten them."

"Listen," replied St. George, "I offer you a share in this adventure because I think you to be a master of the sword. What I propose is this: Let us go out now in the dark, when no one will expect us. We will be sure to come on some of the Mameluke or Arab scouts and if we are sharp, we can take them by surprise, steal a horse each and make a dash for their camp. If you are afraid, go back. I am going on."

Lafangere hesitated, but as the latter walked steadily away toward the desert, the Gascon suddenly made up his mind, slipped his arm through that of St. George, and observed:

"A *maître d'armes* more or less makes no difference. I am with you. But why did you not take the general's horse?"

"Because he was not good enough," said St. George, coolly. "I want the best to be had, and they are all with Mourad Bey."

"*Halte! qui va là?*" suddenly rung out from the sentry on the extreme outpost, who lay behind a hillock of sand and heard them coming.

St. George answered the challenge and gave the countersign, remarking:

"We are going on a little expedition by the general's orders. Have you seen any of the enemy since sunset?"

"There are a lot of them over the hill yonder," said the sentry, gruffly. "I can smell the roast mutton at their fire in the little puffs of wind. Is it not a shame that heathens should feast on the fat of the land, while we good Frenchmen have nothing but dry beans?"

"Wait till we beat them," was the consoling reply of the creole. "We'll have plenty, then."

The soldier growled and resumed his weary watch, while the two friends stole forward in the moonlight, keeping under the shadow of the sandhills and stepping softly.

They had no weapons but their swords, and as soon as they were out of sight of the sentry, they drew these and stole along like thieves.

It was a well-nigh desperate task for these two men to hope to steal on Arabs, born in the desert, by surprise, but these were no common men.

St. George, born in San Domingo, where the Maroons and Caribs still haunted the jungle, and where ambushes were frequent, kept his eyes rolling on all sides, his ears open to the slightest sound, and finally stopped short and whispered:

"They are over the next hill. Down!"

Both Frenchmen sunk to the earth and listened intently. They could hear the sound of voices and the occasional rattle of a harness as a horse shook himself.

The sounds came from the other side of a low hillock of sand that formed the bank of one of those irrigating canals of which Egypt is full, and which are left dry and dusty in the hot season.

Into this canal the two adventurers had crept, and had now come to the point behind which enemies were sheltered; how many no one could say yet.

"Listen," whispered the creole, "we have only one chance—a rush by surprise. I have read about these people, and I know that when they are on guard they never tie their horses. The animals stand loose, ready to be mounted. Look at my saber. It is that of the Mameluke. You see it is sharp. Feel it with your fingers."

Lafangere felt the edge and uttered a slight cry of surprise.

"*Mon Dieu!* it is like a razor. I have cut the skin in just feeling it."

"Very good. Observe too that it is curved with the edge inside like a scythe and has a broad back. One can cut off arms and legs with it like carrots. You have only your small sword. You must get a scimitar like this."

Lafangere shook his head.

"I am satisfied with this. I know the point and I trust to it before all your cuts."

The creole nodded.

"Very well then, come along."

They crept gently up the embankment on hands and knees, and St. George peeped over, instantly drawing back his head and beckoning to Lafangere, who was behind him.

"There are two Mamelukes; the rest Arabs," he whispered. "We can handle them."

The swordmaster crept up beside him and they both lay down on the top of the bank, looking down on a strange scene.

Grouped around a small stinking fire of dry camel's dung, were about a dozen Arabs, in various degrees of ragged and picturesque costume, with their swords lying on the sand, their spears stuck by them, and their scrubby little horses in a patient row, awaiting orders.

Sitting next to the Frenchmen, with their backs toward them, were two men, whose bright steel helmets wreathed in gay shawls, their chain-mail vests and silk and velvet robes, no less than their very gorgeous arms, proclaimed them to belong to the terrible Mameluke cavalry.

They sat gazing at the fire and smoking short chibouques in grim silence, as if they disdained to join in the chatter of the Arabs, who seemed engaged in telling stories. Beside them, their long bridles trailing on the ground, stood two beautiful bay horses, magnificently caparisoned, a carbine and a short mace hanging at the saddle-bow of each.

The Mamelukes, as they could see, had the sashes round their waists full of pistols and daggers, while each had his saber lying on his lap.

The whole group was not twenty feet off, and St. George plucked the sleeve of his companion.

They were too near to risk a whisper, but he pointed to one of the Mamelukes as if to ask if Lafangere could make account of him, and the Gascon nodded and drew up his feet to make a spring.

Slowly and cautiously they crawled to the top, the Arabs being too busy to notice them, and on a sudden made a spring to the bottom of the bank, each on his man.

St. George's victim never uttered a sound as he sheared off his head at a single clip with the terrible scimitar, but the man who fell to Lafangere's share jumped up, turned half round and tried to draw a pistol, just as the Gascon, with a straight lunge, spitted him, mail shirt and all.

With a dying roar of agony and fury the Mameluke threw up his hands and fell, while the Arabs, who had for one moment sat paralyzed, leaped up and drew their swords.

"To the horses!" yelled St. George, and in another moment he was in the saddle of the nearest.

Lafangere tugged at his blade, but it was stuck fast in the Mameluke's body, and St. George shouted:

"Take his saber and mount!"

The order was instantly obeyed and the two Frenchmen dashed into the midst of the demoralized Arabs, where their skill with their weapons made itself felt in a moment.

Had two common soldiers tried the same game they would have been cut to pieces; but two swordmasters, active, powerful and skillful, handled the Arabs like boys; so that in less than five minutes they fled, leaving three dead on the field.

"I told you we could do it," observed St. George, coolly. "You see the point is not always the best in a scuffle like this. Come, let us strip these Mamelukes. They are worth three or four thousand francs each; for they carry all they have on their backs and saddles."

"We are fitted out," cried the Gascon, full of delight. "Who could ask more? St. George, you are a creole angel, and I will go with you wherever you will."

"I will to go to Embabeh and find if the Turks have any artillery. To do that we need to be disguised as Mamelukes. If we are challenged we have good horses."

They hastily assumed the outer dress of the slain Mamelukes, Lafangere observing:

"These gentry are well built. They would have given us a pretty little tussle had we allowed them time to think. See, one, two, four pistols—English too—two daggers and an English carbine—a blunderbuss and this saber which, I must confess, cuts well. My man is a perfect arsenal."

"And mine is no lamb either," said St. George dryly. He has a spiked mace in addition."

They rode away at last, admiring their good fortune, and St. George directed their course straight for the distant glare of Mourad Bey's watchfires.

"I have learned a little Arabic from our friend the professor," he observed, as they rode on, "and you want to know it too. If you meet a man in this country, you don't say good-evening but '*Salam Aleikum.*' Try it."

"Very good—'*Salam Aleikum.*' But suppose he talks or wants to talk?"

"Then we must kill him," said St. George coolly.

"If I mistake not, we shall soon have occasion for all we know, as I see the glitter of steel yonder in the moonlight."

CHAPTER IV.

MOURAD THE MAMELUKE.

THE two adventurers were approaching the camp of the Mameluke Beys, as they could see from the long dusky line of smoke that hung over the palm trees on the banks of the Nile by the little village of Embabeh.

A low bank, that had the appearance of a fortification, stretched for half a mile along the bank, and the space in front was dotted with tents and parties of troops bivouacking, so that St. George observed:

"Those fellows are careless enough in all conscience, or they have too many men to get inside their works. They do not seem even to have a picket out. Hallo! who's this?"

As he spoke they descried a rapidly moving figure dashing through the enemy's camp, followed by several others, all horsemen, and saw the flashes of pistols.

"A deserter, by the blue!" cried Lafangere, excitedly. "See! it is a Mameluke too!"

Indeed, they could tell from the first that the fleeing figure was a horseman, and as he came nearer the glitter of his arms showed him to be a Mameluke. He appeared to be mounted on a gray horse of great swiftness, for he was gaining on his pursuers, and St. George hurriedly said:

"We must help him. If he is a deserter he is against them, and all against them are for us."

Lafangere nodded, and they rode on at a moderate pace, drawing their long Mameluke pistols, to be ready for any emergency.

In less than five minutes the fleeing Mameluke had cleared the camp, to all appearance unscathed by the hasty shots fired at him from all quarters, and came skimming over the sands of the desert like a bird.

Then they halted, and both cried as he came up:

"Who goes there? Halt!"

The fleeing Mameluke pulled his gray horse on its haunches, threw up his right hand and shouted, to their surprise, in French:

"Thank God! I hear the old tongue once more! You are French, messieurs! So am I also! Thank God!"

"Come on then," cried Lafangere, joyfully.

"Who are those behind you?"

"Some of the bey's slaves," answered the stranger, as he rode up. "They are nothing, messieurs. We three can take them all. But how come you here?"

"We are on a scout, to find if the enemy have any field artillery. We surprised and killed two Mamelukes. Can you tell us, have they any guns to move?"

It was St. George who spoke.

"Not one six-pounder. They are all ship's guns, on clumsy carriages, not to be moved out," answered the stranger, in the same hurried, nervous way. Take care, messieurs. They are coming. Can you fence?"

"We are both masters," answered the Gascon, proudly. "And you?"

"I can beat the best of them, and they all know it," returned the stranger. "Put up your pistols. Give them the cold steel. Pistols are fools on galloping horses. Now, messieurs."

They had only time to observe that he was a young-looking man with a slight black mustache and a handsome face, while his dress and arms were of the richest. Then they galloped to meet the oncoming foes, who were five in number, trailing after each other according to the speed of their horses.

In another moment they had closed on the leader, who proved to be a tall negro, black as jet, on a white horse.

The stranger encountered him, and Lafangere uttered a cry of admiration.

"Splendidly done! that's the trick!"

He looked at the combat with the eye of a master of the sword.

The negro, in true Mameluke style, had raised his arm to make a sweeping cut, and the stranger, instead of trying to parry, cut back at the black's wrist, and took off his hand with a light slash.

Not stopping a moment, they swept on at the next two, who were together, and before any one could say how it happened, both went down, one firing a pistol-shot that missed its aim, when the last pair turned their horses and fled in dismay.

"Now, messieurs," observed the stranger, as coolly as if nothing had happened, "we have done enough for the honor of our beautiful France. Let us strip these dead dogs and go into your camp."

St. George hesitated.

"You are quite sure about those ship's guns?" he said. "I don't want to go back to the general without knowing."

"Of course, I am sure," returned the other sharply. "I was Mourad Bey's favorite slave

till an hour ago, and I have been over the whole camp. I can draw a plan if you like. Aha! here is our black friend coming back. Not dead yet. Come, let us kill the dog. He was the first man to call out as I fled."

In fact, at that moment they saw the negro on the white horse, trying to skirt away round them to the Turkish camp.

The stranger had put his horse to a slow canter to intercept the crippled man, when St. George suddenly seized his bridle.

"No," said the creole firmly, "he is helpless and we do not need him. Let him go."

The young stranger flushed angrily.

"Let go my bridle," he cried. "Do you think you can stop Mourad the Mameluke? I am going to kill him!"

For all answer St. George, releasing the bridle, seized the other round the arms and held him with a gripe of iron, while he shouted to the wounded negro:

"Run! Run!"

The black seemed to understand him, for he increased his pace, while the stranger writhed in the arms of St. George, but all in vain, so great was the creole's strength, till a side leap of his horse separated the two and St. George let him drop on the ground.

The stranger was up in a moment, shouting in a tone of fury to his own charger, which had galloped away, and the obedient creature was returning when St. George caught the bridle.

"No, no," cried the creole, "you cannot have him till that poor devil is safe. We French do not murder cripples."

Mourad the Mameluke, as he had called himself, stamped his foot with fury and drew a pistol.

"Insolent!" he cried. "You shall repent this. Let go my horse or I fire."

"If you fire, you are a coward," was the steady reply. "We saved you from your pursuers, and you cannot fight us without disgrace."

"But you insult me," cried Mourad, though he lowered his pistol. "I demand satisfaction."

"You shall have it," answered St. George quietly. "I see that poor fellow is out of danger. Here is your horse."

He let the animal go, and it instantly trotted up to its master, who sprung on its back, drew his saber and was just about to rush on St. George, when Lafangere interposed by riding up beside Mourad and seizing his sword arm by surprise, snatching away the saber.

"No," said the Gascon firmly. "I cannot let this go on. You are a deserter and my prisoner. I am an officer. Sergeant St. George, I forbid you to fight under penalty of arrest."

The Mameluke deserter seemed to be thoroughly taken aback.

He looked helplessly from one to the other and at last burst out laughing.

"Manners have changed in France," he said at last, "or two gentlemen would not interfere with another. That is the way with the *canaille*. Have I made a mistake? Are you not gentlemen?"

Lafangere frowned; for he was an ardent Red Republican.

"We have no gentlemen now. We are all citizens. Are you an aristocrat?"

The stranger did not seem to understand him, for he stared a moment and then asked:

"Who is king of France, now?"

St. George gave a short laugh.

"We have no king. We are all equal. We cut off the head of Louis Capet, who used to be king, five years ago."

The young Mameluke seemed to be utterly astounded by the news.

"Dead!" he muttered. "No king! What then is France?"

"The republic, one and indivisible," was the simultaneous reply, at which Mourad the Mameluke uttered a sort of sigh, and then said quietly:

"I surrender, gentlemen—no, citizens I mean—I have not seen France since I was a boy. I will go with you where you wish."

He rode quietly on with them, his head hanging as if he were much dejected, and when Lafangere offered him his saber, he shook his head, saying:

"Never mind. I shall not need it. When I left France the sword was the weapon of a gentleman; and you say there are no longer gentlemen in France."

"You mistake," said St. George gently. "We are all gentlemen now, if we do not sully our honor. It is honor and truth that mark the gentleman."

"Monsieur—I mean the citizen, will, I trust, excuse me," answered the other with cold politeness. "I have, I own, the misfortune to be noble, though I have been a slave for twelve years. I am astonished by your news. Give me time to become used to the new order of things. A land without gentlemen! The king dead! Then how do you carry on the government without a nobility?"

"We govern ourselves," returned Lafangere proudly, "and any man in France can rise if he have the talent. If you are of noble birth, citizen, I would advise you to keep it secret."

The deserter gave a short bitter laugh.

"Did I say I was noble? It was a lie. I am Mourad the Mameluke. Call me nothing else. That is enough. I am in your power of course, if you choose to betray me, but you may be men of honor. At least you can use a sword."

Lafangere stopped his horse.

"Do you doubt my honor, citizen?" he asked. Mourad laughed again.

"I doubt no man's honor," he answered. "You say there are no gentlemen left in France. Be satisfied, citizen. I am a prisoner."

Lafangere looked doubtfully at him as if he would like to provoke a duel, but St. George coughed warningly and they rode on in silence till they came to the French outposts, where they were halted in the usual fierce style of the day.

Mourad the Mameluke listened to the short colloquy that ensued, and, as they finally rode past the sentry, observed in a low tone, as if wondering:

"And they have changed the uniform too."

"Yes," answered St. George quietly. "We leave white to the Austrians now. We have the tricolor for our flag and we wear the blue uniform. You are going now to the general's headquarters."

"What is the general's name?" asked the Mameluke as they went on.

"General Bonaparte," was the proud answer. "The greatest soldier in Europe."

It was St. George that spoke, but Lafangere interposed rather testily:

"Not so, comrade. General Pichegru is as good a man, or Moreau or Hoche. You men of Italy think no one like your own general."

St. George smiled, but made no answer.

"The stranger listened and shook his head. 'Bonaparte, Pichegru, Moreau—these are all new names. I never heard them.'"

"Why, where have you lived all these years?" inquired Lafangere amazed.

"In Egypt," was the simple reply. "We have no journals here, and slaves are not permitted to hear much news. But this General Bonaparte, who is he?"

"A Corsican artillery officer," said the swordmaster with a shrug. "A man of yesterday."

"A man of genius," corrected St. George, "who in his first campaign took more prisoners and guns than he had in his own army and drove three Austrian generals into the Tyrol one after the other. Moreover, comrade, your general now."

Lafangere shrugged his shoulders silently. At that early period there was a great deal of jealousy among the different armies of France, and the wonderful genius of the young Corsican was not fully recognized among soldiers who had never served under him.

However, the swordmaster said no more, for they were approaching the modest headquarters of the general followed by a buzz of comment from the troops at the sight of three Mamelukes riding into the midst of the army, and in a few moments more St. George pulled up, dismounted and stood stiffly before a slender figure by a little fire, saying:

"The Mamelukes have nothing but ship's guns, general. We have a Frenchman with us, who has been a slave and made his escape. He can tell you the rest."

The young general had been standing by the fire in his usual attitude of thought, his head bent, his hands behind his back.

He looked up quickly.

"Where is the deserter?"

"Here, general."

He beckoned, and the gorgeous Mameluke dismounted and bowed slightly with a certain grace in his movement that did not escape the general's keen gray eyes.

"You are a Frenchman?" he asked sharply.

"I was, monsieur le general."

"Aha! you are noble?"

His tone was low and confidential.

"I was once."

There was a bitter tone in the reply.

"What is your name?"

The general affected not to notice the tone.

"St. George."

The creole sergeant gave a violent start, and the general looked at him sternly.

"Sergeant, you forget yourself. My soldiers are never surprised."

Again he turned to the Mameluke.

"Where were you born?"

"In Martinique."

The general looked interested.

"How came you to Egypt, and how long have you been here?"

"It is a long story, general."

"Make it short and tell it."

The Mameluke nodded stiffly.

"You have the right to give orders in your own camp, but I am a gentleman. My father always said if you please."

The general smiled slightly.

"You will oblige me by telling."

A courtly bow from the Mameluke.

"I am at monsieur's service. I was sent as a child to France to be educated. The ship sailed for Toulon by the Strait of Gibraltar. We were taken by an Algerine corsair, and I was sold as a slave."

"How old were you?"

"Ten, monsieur."

"What year was it?"

"Seventeen eighty-six."

This time the general started slightly.

"The very year I graduated from Brienne. You are then twenty-two?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"But how came you in Egypt?"

"My master came here and sold me to Mourad Bey, in whose service I have been ever since."

"Very good. Can you tell me his force?"

"He has seventy guns in position, with twelve thousand Mamelukes and some forty thousand infantry, who will run if the Mamelukes are beaten."

"Has he any field guns?"

"Not one. The Turks use none in Egypt."

The general turned away and paced up and down in thought for some moments. At last he came to St. George.

"You will be lieutenant-to-morrow," he said, kindly. "I have told my adjutant to make out your commission. Who is your friend holding the horses?"

He looked at Lafangere as he spoke.

"Lafangere, *maitre d'armes* of the Seventh Dragoons," replied the Gascon, saluting.

"You will report to me after the battle of to-morrow," said the general, with a smile of peculiar favor. "The Republic likes to reward brave officers. Go now. I wish to speak to this gentleman alone."

Lafangere and St. George saluted and went away, and the creole, as soon as they were out of hearing, asked:

"Well, what do you think of the general?"

Lafangere broke out warmly. "He is a grand man, it is a pleasure to be under him. I even think he could beat Pichegru, if it comes to that."

St. George laughed.

"I told you you would think so. He is the greatest soldier in the world."

Then he seemed to become gloomy all of a sudden, and Lafangere asked:

"What is the matter, comrade?"

"Did you hear what the deserter said was his name?" asked the creole slowly.

"No. What was it?"

"The same as mine."

"Has he as good a right to it?"

St. George's eyes flashed.

"The creoles say no, but, thank God, the Republic has changed that. Nevertheless he is my brother."

CHAPTER V.

THE DISPATCH.

In the midst of the captured intrenchment of Embabeh, surrounded by dead bodies, overturned guns and carriages, and all the hideous confusion of a place that has been taken by assault, stood the young General Bonaparte, at evening of the next day, his long hair tossed back from his pale face, while he hastily wrote on the top of a soldier's knapsack a letter which seemed to interest him greatly. His gray eyes flashed as he wrote and a smile was on his lips: for the letter was a love epistle.

And yet it was only to his wife.

But in those early days the young Bonaparte adored his creole wife, and his first care after a victory was to send her one of his short nervous epistles. He had done so in Italy, and now at the other end of the earth he did not neglect the habit. And truly it was a triumphant letter he wrote, and such as few other men could have written with truth.

HEART OF MY LIFE:

"I send you the love of my whole nature from under the shadow of the Pyramids, surrounded by the arms of Victory, which cannot make me forget yours. Ah, my Josephine, what torment is it to think that a thousand miles of ocean roll between us, and that I cannot have wings by wishing. I have everything else, for Egypt is mine. We have driven the Mamelukes into the Nile; Mourad Bey is a fugitive; Cairo is ours; and my first thought is only, oh! if Josephine were here to see her own Napoleon! one kiss from you would be more precious than all the riches of Egypt. But we cannot be here long, and as soon as I have pacified the country I shall fly to rejoin you. The five idiots who call themselves Directors, and think they rule France, cannot bury me in Egypt. I shall return when they least expect it. In the mean time keep on good terms with them, and learn all you can for me; for I have no news from France for some months. I send you this by a gentleman from Martinique, who has been a slave among the Turks for twelve years. His name is Saint George. Treat him well and send him back with news."

"A thousand kisses."

Thine own

"NAPOLEON."

As he finished and sealed the letter he looked up and said in an ordinary tone:

"Volunteers to go to France!"

It was ludicrous to notice the eager way in which all the officers leaped toward him, crying:

"Me! General, me! Take me!"

The general smiled sarcastically.

"Perhaps you would not be so eager to go if you knew what I mean. The man who takes this letter will not go by boat, but must ride to Alexandria by the way we came, through the Arabs, and do it to-night."

There was a general drawing back, for the desert was known to be swarming with Arabs.

Only one man remained near the general, and he wore the uniform of the Guides. On his shoulder was a new epaulet, and the stripes of a sergeant had lately been unpicked from his sleeves, where the marks still remained on his dusty jacket. He saluted stiffly.

"I am ready to go, general, if I can take two friends with me."

"Who are your friends?"

"They both long to see France, which one has not seen for twelve years."

"And the other?"

"The other is Maitre d'Armes Lafangere."

The general compressed his lips.

"On my word you creoles have assurance. Will they go?"

"They will, if I ask them, general. And we three can get to Alexandria alive."

"Humph! I thought so. In fact, I have put in the letter that St. George would bring it, but not you. The other."

The creole colored deeply under his olive skin and answered stiffly.

"Very good, general. If he is preferred, I have no complaint to make, though he is my younger brother."

The general looked keenly at him.

"What romance is this you tell? You are not from Martinique; you are from St. Domingo."

The new lieutenant smiled bitterly.

"I know it, general. Unfortunately, our father had estates in both islands. You are not a creole, general; but you have married one. You should know there are brothers in the Antilles that white man's law does not recognize; but God does."

The general listened attentively, and then bowed to the creole with a manner that showed some respect.

"Whatever they think about these things in the Antilles, lieutenant, I hold men for what they are worth in brains and courage alone. You have permission to seek your comrades, and you shall have the letter."

St. George turned away, highly elated, and found his friend Lafangere sitting on a captured gun, with a mournful air.

"Well, Lafangere, we have had a great victory," he remarked.

The swordmaster made a grimace.

"So much the worse. If they had beaten us, we should have retreated to our ships and gone back to France. As it is, we shall have to stay and take care of this accursed burned up country, where the Israelites used to be made slaves; and it served them right for coming here."

"How would you like then to go back to Alexandria to-night and sail for Paris at once with a dispatch?" asked St. George.

Lafangere jumped up and gave a shout.

"Really! Have I a chance? Heaven! I would go through another battle to get it. But you are not surely in earnest."

"I am," replied the creole gravely, "but it is at a great risk. We must ride all the way to Alexandria alone."

"No matter," returned Lafangere obstinately. "I'll try it. You and I can do it—at least we could if we had that brother of yours along. We three could storm the mouth of hell, I verily believe. Where is he, by the by?"

"I hardly know. I have not seen him since yesterday night," said St. George moodily. He has been with the general ever since, I suppose, telling him all about the country. I see him nowhere."

"That is because you don't look in the right place," retorted Lafangere laughing. "Look yonder on the other side of the general."

They could indeed see the handsome face and slender, active figure of the Mameluke deserter, talking to Bonaparte; though, a moment before, he had not been visible.

The general seemed to be speaking to him earnestly and seriously, while the young man listened with respect.

Presently he came over to them, and said, with a bow to St. George:

"The general says you wish to speak to me, and tells me further that you bear the same name as I. That is singular. How is it, and what have you to say?"

There was a tinge of haughtiness in his tone that marked the ineffaceable spirit of the old French noblesse.

The creole answered with just as much haughtiness:

"There is nothing strange about it. I am your elder brother. That is all."

The other St. George started back and laid his hand on his sword.

"You lie," he cried fiercely. "I am my father's only son, Adrian de St. George. I never had brother or sister."

Emil St. George's mouth seemed to harden into lines of bronze as he answered:

"You are mistaken. I do not say *you lie*, because you are my brother, and I do not want to kill you. But your father and mine were the same, and he loved my mother better than yours."

Adrian de St. George turned white to the lips.

"Was that what you wished to say?"

"No. I wished to ask if you dared to ride with me to Alexandria with a letter for the general. If you are afraid, say so. You are all white; I am of the mixed blood. You understand now? Let us see which is the braver of us two."

The escaped Mameluke looked at the other in a singular way, and Lafangere watched them keenly. Being a native Frenchman he knew little of the customs and nothing of the feelings of the natives of the French Antilles, where the institution of slavery had but lately culminated in the horrors of the St. Domingo rebellion.

He saw these two young men, singularly alike in face and figure, unmistakably brothers, gazing at each other with looks of intense hatred and jealousy.

The Mameluke's face was just like that of the Guide, the features somewhat sharper, the eyes more fierce; but St. George's hair curled in ringlets while there was no tinge of color on his olive cheek.

Adrian looked at Emil, who returned his glance in the same burning way, and at last the younger brother said:

"You wish to know if I am afraid. I am the Count of St. George. Tell that to your comrades here, the butchers, the grocers, the scullions. Tell them I am aristocrat to the backbone and that my father died in the Tuilleries defending the king against a mob of savages. Tell them that, and then see if I am afraid to die."

Lafangere had listened with more patience than he would have shown six years before; but the sentiments of Red Republicanism were growing weaker in the French army under the Directory.

Emil St. George waited till the other had finished and replied gravely:

"France still lives and needs the services of her sons, not that they should kill each other. The general sends dispatches to France by me. I have the privilege of taking two comrades with me by way of the desert. Will you be one of them?"

The escaped Mameluke nodded.

"I will go. But I tell you beforehand that the chances are against us. The country is full of enemies, exasperated by defeat."

"That is why I ask you to go. I need a brave comrade, and, though we hate each other, you are, after all, St. George as well as I."

Adrian favored him with a haughty sneer as he retorted:

"I am sorry I cannot return the compliment. You have assumed the name of St. George, which is as good as any other for you, but I, for one, do not recognize it as yours. I will go with you because France needs us both; but, once at home, I warn you two St. Georges can not live."

CHAPTER VI.

THE BROTHERS.

A PARTY of swarthy, villainous-looking Arabs on lean ponies, with ragged tunics and long cane spears, had just halted by the banks of the Nile near Damanhour to water their horses.

All around them were fields of yellow wheat, trampled down by the passage of armies and beaten into the dust of the long summer.

"Oh, son of Habib," said one Arab, "I begin to think that the Prophet has turned his face from the true believers to smile on the Franks. Such a victory never was won. The Mamelukes are scattered to the four winds and their power is gone."

"Oh, son of Ayoub," replied the second, "the best thing we can do is to make a friend of the Frank general by killing all the Mamelukes we meet."

"Easier said than done," remarked a third. "The Mamelukes have pistols and guns, and their horses are the best of Arabia, while we have only our spears and a few swords. The Franks can kill them, for they are lords of the fire; but we must keep friends with the Mamelukes till they are all dead."

They were interrupted in their colloquy by a warning cough from the scout, who sat on his horse at top of the bank, watching the desert.

"What is it, oh son of Abdallah?" asked Ibu Habib. "Who comes?"

The scout held up three fingers against the sky, and made a circular motion round his head as if indicating a turban.

"Three Mamelukes," muttered the son of Habib. "Let us set on them, brothers. We are seventeen, and they but three. It will earn us the favor of the Franks to bring them in, dead or alive."

And as the son of Ayoub seconded the idea on the ground that there were only three of them, the whole party rode into a dry canal and hid themselves to wait for the coming of the Mamelukes.

In the meantime the advancing cavaliers were riding on at an easy amble and any one close to them could see that, though their dress and arms were those of Moslems, their faces were shaven after the fashion of the Franks.

"I see no traces of marauding Arabs," the *maitre d'armes* observed, looking toward the moonlit Nile. "The country seems to be

deserted by all. What do you think has become of them, Monsieur Mourad?"

Mourad the Mameluke shook his head gloomily as he answered:

"So much the worse for us. They have fled to upper Egypt, and will make head in more force than ever. Besides, I don't wish you to call me Mourad. I am the Count of St. George."

Lafangere smiled.

"We have no counts now; and my comrade here, is the only St. George I know. To us you are Mourad the Mameluke, till you have earned the title of a Frenchman, who loves France better than a decayed noblesse."

Mourad's eye flashed.

Coming back among Frenchmen after a twelve years' slavery, brooding over the feudal glories of his house, he had not yet become educated to the republic, and, all through the journey Lafangere had kept taking the half-blood's part and calling the aristocrat nothing but Mourad.

The young man's fierce spirit, chafing under the infliction, now burst out in fury, and he suddenly cried out:

"Then get to Alexandria by yourselves. I can take care of my own head."

With that he wheeled his horse and dashed away, as it happened, right into the dry canal where the Arabs were in ambush, to be surrounded in another moment and fighting for his life.

The valiant sons of Habib, Ayoub and Abdallah charged him simultaneously as he struck the bed of the canal, and splintered their canes lances on his mail shirt, knocking him out of the saddle before he could defend himself.

Then, with loud yells, they jumped down to finish him; but in a moment he was up, fighting fiercely, sweeping his razorlike scimitar round him, and cutting off limbs at every stroke which reached his enemies.

Still, they were too many for him and had the advantage of surprise.

Just as he cut down the son of Habib, another Arab rode at him from behind, and trampled him down, when they all rushed in to kill him as he lay.

St. George and Lafangere saw him go over the bank and heard the yells, and the *maitre d'armes* laughed savagely.

"Let him take care of his head now," he cried. "The accursed aristocrat is well served. His friends have him."

But St. George drew a pistol.

"Come on!" he said, to the Gascon. "He is my brother, and God sees us. Let us go to his rescue."

A louder burst of yells and the clash of swords came over the bank of the canal as he spoke, and Lafangere cried out:

"Let them fight. It will clear our way to Alexandria."

For all answer St. George dashed at the canal and was over in another moment, when Lafangere heard a pistol-shot.

The Gascon no longer hesitated.

Drawing both pistols, he galloped to the canal and saw the creole hotly engaged with a dozen Arabs, while several more were busy round the prostrate form of Mourad, the Mameluke, whose horse was trotting off, neighing wildly.

The Gascon dashed into the midst of the fray, firing both pistols as they nearly touched the bodies of a couple of Arabs, and then set to work with his sabre, cutting right and left at the poorly-armed Bedouins, ably seconded by his comrades.

The Arabs, at the best of times, had been desperately afraid of the Mamelukes, and these three men, or at least two of them, seemed to be more formidable than any they had ever met before.

Hemmed up in the narrow bed of the canal, they could not surround the two men, who kept charging and cutting with their long sabers.

The Arabs, being ignorant of fencing, rarely parry, and trust to jumping one side from a cut, but here they had no opportunity to do so. It was give and take, two men against a dozen; but the two had armor and long sabers like razors, the dozen were naked and had only short yataghans.

In three minutes from the beginning of the fight the Arabs fled, leaving four dead men in the canal, and Lafangere said:

"Our aristocrat has had his allowance. He could take care of his head; but, after all, his head is the only one that has suffered in this little affair."

He was actually wheeling his horse to ride away, when St. George dismounted and went up to the body of Mourad, which lay still at the bottom of the canal.

"Help, comrade!" he said gravely. "My brother has been hurt, and God is looking down at us now."

There was something so simple and solemn in his words that the Gascon, who had not, after all, a bad heart, immediately returned and assisted him to examine the body of Mourad.

To their surprise they found no blood on it, though he was deadly pale and quite insensible.

Lafangere felt his pulse and exclaimed:

"It beats yet, but where is he hurt?"

St. George lifted him up, and Mourad uttered a faint sigh.

Presently he began to move and tried to stand up, looking round as if bewildered and muttering in Arabic.

"What cheer, comrade?" asked Lafangere. "Did they cut you anywhere?"

Mourad turned his head and seemed to recognize him, for he asked faintly:

"Are you hurt?"

"No. We found you down, and my comrade St. George shot one of the scamps. I disposed of two others, and your brother took off the head of a fourth."

Mourad looked round into the face of St. George wistfully.

"Did you come to my help?" he asked.

"You are the lawful head of my house," was the grave answer of the creole. "God sees us, my brother, as he saw Cain and Abel. Are you hurt badly?"

"A horse knocked me down. I think he broke my ribs," said the Mameluke in a faint tone. "Go on to Alexandria. The way is plain from here. Leave me."

"Not till we are safe within the gates," said St. George quietly. "You can ride at a foot pace, and we are not ten miles from the place."

Mourad turned away his head with a convulsion expressive of great pain.

"I will try," he said slowly, "but you will have to help me on my horse."

They did so, and he nearly fell off in a faint, though the docile creature stepped as gingerly as if walking on glass, and seemed to be conscious that his master was hurt.

Slowly they rode over the plain, Mourad swaying from side to side as if dizzy with the pain, the creole riding close to him and supporting him as tenderly as a mother tending a child.

Not a soul was in sight; for the Arabs had deserted the country since the spread of the news of the battle of the Pyramids, and, in two hours after, they saw the lights of Alexandria glimmering ahead.

Then Mourad spoke faintly.

"You are very kind," he said to St. George. "Will you grant me a favor when we go in?"

"I will," replied the creole unhesitatingly.

"Call me henceforth nothing but Mourad. I have learned a lesson to-night, and I feel that I am not so worthy of the name of St. George as you, who have been a brother to one whom you owe naught but hate."

"You mistake," returned St. George gently. "We could neither of us help being born. The wrong lay in one who is dead. He might have sold me for a slave. Instead, he caused me to be educated as a man, and the Republic makes us all equal."

"Nevertheless," returned the other, "grant my request. None know me save as the Mameluke Mourad. Let me be that to all the world, and do you continue to make worthy the name you bear."

Still St. George hesitated.

"The general knows, and our dispatches mention your name. It cannot be hidden from the world."

"It can," replied Mourad. "Say I was killed by the Arabs. To you I am only Mourad, a prisoner, who talks no French. You wounded me in the fight. Promise me this, or I will turn back."

"I promise," answered St. George; "but here is Lafangere."

"He will promise too," returned Mourad, "for he is a man of the sword too, and we three, united, can do anything and go anywhere. See, yonder comes the dawn. No. What is it?"

The flash and sullen boom of a gun out at sea answered him.

"It is the English fleet," said Lafangere.

CHAPTER VII. THE GREEK PICARON.

It was indeed the English fleet, under Nelson, advancing to entrap their unwary foes, as if Providence, which had hitherto favored the French, were weary of seeing its gifts abused. On one day the battle of the Pyramids made Bonaparte the master of Egypt; on the next his fleet was destroyed by the almost incredible carelessness of an admiral, who expiated the fault with his life.

Nelson, with only thirteen ships, captured or ruined a fleet of fifteen French vessels, of which five were stronger than his best; and in a single day the French saw themselves cut off from France and doomed to stay in Egypt for an indefinite time, for the five French ships which escaped from Nelson made off for Corfu, and were not seen again for months.

Our three adventurers, who had seen the whole disaster from the shore, were astounded and heart-broken.

In one moment to be dashed from the height of triumph to the depths of despair is a terrible sensation for any man, and to Frenchmen, with their mercurial dispositions, doubly so.

When it was all over Lafangere sat on the beach, watching the English and French ships, crippled and dismayed, lying at their anchors, while Villeneuve made off with five vessels that

had not fired a shot during the battle, and the *maitre d'armes* wept like a child.

"We shall never see France again," he sobbed. "Oh, my friends, why did we ever come to this accursed country, and why does Heaven allow these Englishmen to beat us on the sea, with all the chances in our favor?"

St. George who had been standing gloomily watching the bay of Aboukir, here broke in on the other's tirade:

"We have had a heavy blow," he said, "but I was with the general at Arcola, when all hung on a thread, and we beat at last. I am going to France, if you will come with me."

Lafangere made a gesture of despair.

"How can we go? Do you not see all our ships are gone or taken?"

"There are hundreds more in the port. I can see their masts."

"But they are not ships of war."

"They can sail, and, as you see, the English are in no condition to pursue. To-day is our time. To-morrow will be too late. They will have refitted. What thinks Mourad?"

The Mameluke, who still looked pale and weak from his accident, bowed his head.

"I think you are right," he said. "If we can find a Greek felucca in port we can get off. The Greeks are devils to risk chases."

"But we do not know their language," objected Lafangere, determined to be miserable, "and you are in no condition to go with a broken rib."

Mourad allowed a faint smile to cross his face as he answered:

"A broken rib soon heals at sea and we Mamelukes are used to broken bones. I know their languages here. If you are willing I am ready to go."

St. George nodded gravely.

"Mourad is right. Let us depart. To-morrow will be too late. See. The English are as busy as bees."

In fact they could see the masts and rigging of the crippled English ships black with men, getting up new masts, and generally repairing damages with a vigor and zest that showed they appreciated the perils of their position should a storm come on.

They were too busy even to find time to fire at the crowds of French on the shore carrying off what they could save from two stranded ships, and it is an actual fact that the French flag flew on the deserted line-of-battle ship *Tonnant* for many hours, because the English were too busy to send a boat aboard the wreck.

"Such are the chances of war," observed St. George, gloomily, as they passed the *Tonnant*. "Oh, *mon Dieu*, what will the general say when he hears the news?"

"Ought we not to go back and tell him?" asked Lafangere.

"By no means. The news will go fast enough to him and to France too. We have our orders to go to Paris. Let others take this news to Cairo. I go where the general tells me, for he is the first soldier in the world, as you will admit, comrade."

"That is true, comrade. He is."

Lafangere had surrendered at discretion after the battle of the Pyramids, and never was heard to talk of Pichegru again.

They went slowly along the shore to where they had left their horses and rode into Alexandria.

The city was all in confusion; with a motley crowd of sailors, Arabs, Greeks, Maltese and the rest, talking together with gestures of dismay at the disaster that had just befallen them.

They were hardly noticed in the general confusion and went down to the port, which was crowded with transports and trading vessels of all the Mediterranean nations, but nearly empty of men who had gone to look at the battle.

It was early morning; for the battle of Aboukir Bay had lasted most of the night, and a fresh breeze was blowing out of the port toward France.

"Now," quoth the Gascon, "the question is, how shall we get to sea? Here are ships, but where are the sailors? and we have no money."

"Let not that trouble you," interrupted St. George. "The general gave me an order for funds on the paymaster, and we can sell our horses for two thousand francs each to the officers."

"I propose then," rejoined the Gascon, whose spirits seemed to be rising with the prospect of going to France, "that we divide our labors. I will sell the horses and get the money, while you two procure the ship."

"An excellent idea," observed Mourad. "I see a man I think I know, yonder."

They gave up their horses to Lafangere who led them away to the quartermaster's office, where he knew he could sell them at advantage, taking with him St. George's order.

Then the other two walked along the quay to where a slender, swarthy Greek was standing at the steps, with a Turkish pipe in his mouth, looking at the water.

Mourad spoke to this man in some language St. George did not understand, and the other shrugged his shoulders and made an indifferent reply.

"I asked him if he had a vessel ready to sail,"

explained Mourad, "and he says how can he sail without a cargo? He is our man if we pay enough. I know his face. He is a picaroon."

"A what?"

"A picaroon. Half these Greeks are robbers, when they get a chance to do it, and escape unknown, by sinking the ship they take in the night. It is their only way to get even with the Turks."

"Then this man will not be a safe one to take us to France. He may want to sell us to the Turks."

"I have thought of that, and it is certain that we must be on our guard. But, after all, we three are a match for a dozen Greeks, and he has but a dozen."

"Which is his vessel?"

Mourad pointed to a low, black vessel, hardly more than a large boat.

She had a long, pointed stern, like the beak of a stork, a raised cabin at the stern, covered with gilded carvings, three short, stumpy masts, two raking forward, the third cocked up behind the cabin, on the very end of the stern, two long yards tapering and set at an angle to the decks, and a general outlandish and picturesque appearance that suggested the Orient.

"That is his xebec," said the Mameluke. "I know her well, for I have seen her before. She can sail like a witch, pulls twelve sweeps, and all she needs is a gun to make her a regular picaroon."

"But what does she here?"

"Oh, a peaceful trader, of course, since the French came in. Master Nikolai has the reputation of being a spy if he can get enough pay."

"Yet you think of going on his vessel?"

"It is because he is such a rascal."

"How is that an inducement?"

"An honest trader would not take the risk Nikolai will, for money."

"How much shall we offer him?"

"Half to start and the other half when he puts us ashore at Marseilles."

"But if he tries treachery on the way?"

"He will not."

"Why not?"

Mourad smiled sarcastically.

"He knows me too well. I have seen him before. I once had him bastinadoed."

"What is that?"

"Beaten to a jelly. He thinks I am still a Mameluke who has deceived the French, and that I want to go to Stamboul—Constantinople."

"Indeed? Why do you tell him that?"

"Because he is such a scamp. If I told him I want to go to France he would take me to Constantinople. If I tell him I want to go to Stamboul, he will think it a very smart trick to take me to France."

While the two were thus conversing apart, the Greek who bore such a slender reputation smoked his pipe and cast furtive glances at them.

He knew not exactly what to make of them on account of their Mameluke dress. He saw them apparently on friendly terms with the French, and wondered who these men could be. Deserters possibly.

Mourad took care to keep him from talking to St. George, whom he cautioned to use no French before Nikolai and to go and intercept Lafangere before the worthy Gascon came in to spoil all.

Then he returned to the Greek, and the following dialogue ensued:

"If you cannot sail without a cargo, you can at least take passengers to Stamboul."

"Perhaps, if I am paid well enough."

"What do you call well enough?"

"Ten thousand piastres each."

"You shall have it when we get there."

"That is not enough."

"Why not?"

"I want to see the money now."

"You shall have half. We will give you fifteen thousand piastres as we leave port, and fifteen more when you land us where we wish to land."

"At Stamboul?"

"It may be somewhere else."

The Greek looked more interested. He began to scent an adventure.

"You are then important people," he said in a whisper. "Who is with you?"

"If you promise not to tell I will say it."

"I swear by the cross of St. Basil—"

"That is enough. Do you know what has just happened?"

"Yes. The English have beaten the French fools and the fate of the army is sealed."

"You are wrong. The French hold Egypt. They have beaten the Mamelukes; taken Cairo, and Mourad Bey has fled."

The Greek looked amazed.

"How am I to believe all this?"

"It is true. We have fled through the French lines. I learned their language and we call ourselves deserters, but what I really want is to take the news to Stamboul and implore help from the Sultan."

"But suppose—"

Nikolai stopped and Mourad watched him. He saw the struggle going on in the Greek's mind between two conflicting ideas.

He was thinking should he get most from taking the supposed Mameluke envoy to Constantinople, or selling him to the French at once.

The wily Mameluke, tutored by slavery in habits of double-dealing, slipped in:

"Suppose you go and inform on me now, you mean? That would be foolish, as you would lose all the money we are to pay you, and the Franks would seize it, and perhaps give you the bastinado too."

Nikolai winced at that idea.

He only knew the East, and his memory of former bastinadoes was vivid. He had no doubt that the French behaved just as an Oriental would with the stick—used it to pay all inconvenient debts.

Nikolai made up his mind.

"I will take you, if you will pay down fifteen thousand piastres now and the rest when I land you."

"It is a bargain."

Mourad turned away and spied his two friends coming down the quay. He hurried toward them and asked:

"Well, how much have you got?"

Lafangere was full of excitement.

"I have sold the horses for seven thousand francs, and the harness for two thousand more. Then our order was for three thousand, so that we have twelve thousand francs in gold. Is it not grand? How much must we pay for our passage?"

"Fifteen thousand piastres, at four to the franc; that is, let me see—"

"Three thousand seven hundred and fifty francs, leaving us eight thousand and two hundred and fifty to spend in France. Monsieur Mourad, our fortunes are made. With that sum we can see Paris."

"Remember, we are not there yet. You must not speak a word of French before the Greek. I think he will try to give us up to the first French frigate he meets."

"Just what we want; but why?"

"Because he thinks us Turkish spies. If he knew we were French, he would try to sell us to the English out yonder."

Lafangere whistled.

"What an unconscionable scoundrel!"

"He is a Greek, my friend, and they are all liars," replied Mourad, calmly. "Come, let us go. I see he is signaling his boat."

In fact, they saw the Greek waving his hand, and very soon after a small boat shot from the side of the xebec and came to the stairs, where Mourad and his two comrades got in and were rowed to the little vessel.

The Mameluke paid over the money and did all the business, while St. George and Lafangere were compelled to assume the role of mutes, to avoid exposing their race, and Nikolai remarked suspiciously:

"How quiet your friends are. One would think they were under a vow."

"They are," said Mourad, readily. "They took an oath after our defeat to speak to no man but me, till they had seen the sultan."

Then Nikolai went out of the little cabin, and they watched the crew of slim and swarthy Greeks bending to their sweeps as the xebec moved out of the harbor.

At any other time they might have had difficulty in leaving the place without a permit; but the confusion and alarm were so great that the officials were away from their posts, and it is probable that a single division of troops could have captured Alexandria by a brisk assault.

Once outside, the crew spread the wide lateen sails of the little vessel, and she shot away over the waves at a speed that caused Lafangere to whisper to St. George:

"We can run from the English at any rate. I begin to feel as if we should yet revisit France."

CHAPTER VIII.

FEELING THE WAY.

NIGHT had closed over the Mediterranean, and the stars were shining all over the heavens, as the little xebec stretched away to the north, when Lafangere observed, in a tone of uneasiness to St. George:

"I don't know what you think, but I am of opinion that we have gone long enough in this direction. It is true I am no sailor, but I learned geography at school, and I know the north star when I see it over our bowsprit. This is not the way to France."

"My friend," tranquilly replied the creole, "I learned one thing in Italy under the general—to obey orders. We are in Mourad's hands, and he will change our course when it is necessary."

"That is all very well, but suppose he is deceived. This Greek seems to be taking us to Constantinople. Where is the Mameluke, and how is he going to prevent it?"

St. George pointed forward, where they could see Mourad talking earnestly to the Greek, and soon after he came to them with an expression of concern on his handsome features.

"My friends," he said, "I fear we shall have to fight."

"I thought so from the moment we left port,"

answered St. George quietly. "What is the matter now?"

"We are far enough to the north, and it has become necessary to change our course," replied Mourad. "I have been trying to persuade Nikolai to sail for the west, and he refuses."

"I expected as much. Why?"

"He says he engaged to take me to Stamboul, and he is going there. I think he suspects we are French."

"Why not tell him so, and make him turn the boat to the west?"

"Because to do so we must fight, and, if we kill all the Greeks, we are as badly off as ever."

"Why so?"

"Because we are not sailors."

St. George shrugged his shoulders.

"It is not necessary to be bred a sailor to handle a vessel like this with a fair wind. I am a creole, and have crossed the Atlantic more than once. A man cannot do that without learning something of the sea."

Mourad looked at him attentively.

"Do you mean to say—?" he began.

"I mean to say that I am going to France with these Greeks if they will let me: without them if they will not. To get there we must have discipline and a head. I propose that Lafangere, who is the oldest officer among us, take the command, that we call this Greek aft, and tell him who we are."

Mourad seemed to be impressed by his words, for he answered respectfully:

"I think you are always right, but I would rather you were the chief."

"So would I," interposed Lafangere. "What do I know of the sea? When we get to land I will do what you please: but I confess I feel like a fool here. I am ready to obey your orders, St. George."

"Very well," answered the creole. "Call the Greek here. Does he understand French?"

"I think he does a little, but he will pretend not."

"Tell him then, in Arabic, Greek or whatever language you like."

Mourad called to the Greek captain who had been watching them furtively from a group of sailors forward, and Nikolai instantly came to them, followed by the whole of his men, with a swaggering manner that boded ill for their safety.

"Tell him to send his men forward," said St. George, quietly, and as he spoke, he and Lafangere laid their hands on the pistols in their sashes, at which the Greeks fell back and allowed the captain to come on alone.

"Now tell him," continued the creole, "that we are three French officers, who have dispatches that must go to France, and that, if he takes us there safely, he shall have the money we promised him. Tell me his answer."

Mourad explained to Nikolai, and the Greek burst into a torrent of words which the Mameluke translated as follows:

"He says that he is a poor man; that he never would have left Alexandria had we not deceived him; that it is quite impossible to reach France on account of the English cruisers, which swarm everywhere, and that he would rather go back to Alexandria and give up all the money than run the risk."

St. George smiled.

"I see he is growing cautious. He wants to go back to give us up to the English, who are, by this time, able to sail. Tell him he has no choice. He must do as we wish."

Mourad translated the answer, and the Greek immediately ran back to his men and began to talk loudly to them.

"He is trying to persuade them to take us prisoners," said Mourad. "What are your orders, Monsieur St. George?"

St. George and Lafangere rose.

"In the first place," said the creole, "it is necessary for one of us to take the helm. Can you two handle those fellows alone, or shall we trust one of our foes to steer the vessel?"

All doubt on this point was ended by Nikolai calling loudly in Greek to the steersman, who immediately left the tiller and ran forward, letting the xebec fly up into the wind, which she would have done with disastrous effect, had not St. George seized the helm at the right moment.

"Now, gentlemen," pursued the creole, as calmly as if nothing had happened, "there is no time to play with these men. They are twelve to three, but they have only their knives, and we have four pistols, a carbine and a saber each. Summon them to surrender, Mourad."

The Mameluke did as he was ordered, but Nikolai answered, defiantly:

"You are nobody. The English are the rulers. You are prisoners."

"Come and take us, then, if you can," cried Mourad, and with that he leveled his pistol at the Greek captain, who in a moment threw his knife full at the Mameluke's breast.

The flash and report of the long Turkish pistol were instantaneous, and Nikolai fell, when all the Greeks made a desperate rush aft with their knives.

Mourad had received the Greek's knife full on his chest, whence it dropped off to the deck with a dull clang that told it had struck armor, and he and the *maitre d'armes* fired off their

long pistols with such effect that their assailants turned and made for the fore-hatch, when they dived down in terror, leaving the captain and three dead men behind them on the deck.

"Don't go forward," cried St. George, in a warning tone, as the Gascon was about to rush on. "There are eight yet, and your pistols are empty. Load up."

And, not till they had obeyed his orders, would the cautious creole permit them to go to the fore hatch, when Mourad looked down and called out:

"Come up, one by one, or we will come down and kill you all."

Pretty soon a trembling Greek, who had thrown away his knife, came crawling up, and was brought to St. George, who questioned him through Mourad, and found that the captain had promised them all a share in the reward to be paid by the English in case they took the Frenchmen in to Nelson's fleet.

"Ask him if he and his comrades are willing to sail the boat under our orders," said the creole.

The Greek swore by all the saints in his calendar to do the bidding of the French if they would spare his life, and the result was that the eight men of the crew left alive were brought up on deck, sworn to fidelity, disarmed of their knives, and set to work.

The course of the little vessel was also changed to the west, and Lafangere remarked, as he saw a Greek sailor once more at the helm:

"We may get to France after all."

"We shall get to France," responded St. George. "The only question is, how soon?"

But Mourad still seemed uneasy.

"You cannot trust these Greeks," he told the other. "They are only waiting till we are asleep to change the course of the vessel. We shall have to keep watch."

"One at a time," answered Lafangere. "It is only picket duty after all. Here we have three reliefs, and I would like to see these fellows get the best of three good Frenchmen like us. Who takes first watch? I am willing, for I feel as if I should need no sleep to-night."

It was agreed that St. George and the Mameluke should go to sleep in the little deck cabin, fully armed, while Lafangere acted as captain till he got too sleepy to watch longer, and, somewhat to the other's surprise, the Gascon never waked them till the sun was rising astern of them, when he shook St. George by the shoulder and told him:

"I kept them due west all night, but I see a ship ahead of us that may very likely be an Englishman. Not being a sailor, I don't exactly know how to get out of his way."

St. George jumped up instantly and went out on deck, where he found that they were still sailing west with a fair breeze, while a large frigate lay, with her maintopsail aback, not two miles off, dead ahead, as if waiting for them.

Away to the north were some blue hills, just rising out of the sea, and the creole observed to Lafangere:

"That is Candia, and its bays are full of picaroons; so we cannot run in there. We must run for Africa again, if we hope to escape an English prison."

"But, good Heavens!" exclaimed Lafangere, "have I not done right?"

St. George made no answer till he had taken the helm and directed the sailors by signs to trim the xebec flat to the wind so as to slant away from the frigate.

Then he said to Lafangere:

"You are not a sailor, it is true; but you must know that's a ship's guns are more powerful than our field batteries. That frigate can sink us if we come within gunshot. See! she is after us already."

In fact, as they were looking, they saw the great yards of the huge ship swing round, while a swarm of black dots went rapidly up the rigging.

She had been lying to under reefed topsails before, as if waiting; but, as they looked, a white cloud of canvas was spread to the wind from every yard, and the majestic vessel began to rush through the water, with the evident intention of cutting them off from further western progress.

"How far do a ship's guns carry?" the *maitre d'armes* asked with a great deal of interest, as soon as this became quite clear even to his landsman's eye.

St. George shrugged his shoulders.

"It depends on the gun. We shall soon see what this ship carries."

They were bowling along at a rapid pace, eating up into the wind as close as they could, and, as if to verify St. George's remark, a flash issued from the side of the frigate, and they saw the puffs of white spray as the ball went skipping over the waves, till it disappeared about a quarter of a mile from their side in a direct line.

"Now you see for yourself," remarked the creole dryly. "You see, moreover, that there are good gunners aboard that ship, and that we have just a quarter of a mile to spare. Upon my faith, Lafangere, had you neglected to wake me for five minutes longer, that ball would have knocked a hole in us."

At this moment Mourad the Mameluke, who had been sleeping soundly, came on deck out of the cabin, awakened by the noise of the gun, and exclaimed in French:

"Take care. Now is the time to beware of treachery. The Greeks are sailors; we are not. Watch them."

There were only four of the Greeks on deck as he spoke and St. George asked him quickly:

"Have you ever been at sea since you were a child?"

"Certainly. I am used to these craft here, though I know nothing of your big ships. I see, for instance, that you have something towing overboard, and that it must retard our speed."

St. George started and ran to the port quarter, where, sure enough, was a rope towing overboard.

As he hauled at it, he found an unusual resistance, and Mourad came to his help.

Between them they hauled on board a spare sail, to all appearance left to tow on purpose, and the Mameluke said savagely:

"I thought so. The cowards are afraid to fight, but they want the frigate to catch us. Hallo! what's that?"

Another flash and boom, and a second shot that dropped into the water close abeam, told what it was.

The English frigate was getting nearer.

Another cable length, and they would be within range.

With a guttural Arabic curse Mourad drew his saber and rushed all round the bulwarks, looking over the side to find if any thing else were towing.

Presently he made a hack at something outside, and St. George saw, to his intense amazement, a sack of grain go floating astern, while the increased speed with which the xebec slipped through the water sufficiently showed the means that had been used to retard her.

Then the Mameluke shouted in Arabic to the steersman, who was looking very pale and frightened, and bellowed down the hatchway something that brought the Greeks running upon deck in a bunch, jabbering together.

"What is the matter?" asked Lafangere, innocently. "What have they done?"

"Cheated us out of two points in the wind," cried Mourad, savagely. "I know the thieves."

And he kept up such a hectoring and beating with the flat of his saber, that he speedily had the Greeks hauling at the ropes, trimming everything flat as boards, while the felucca slipped away from the frigate at such a rate that it was easy to see they would escape, when the ship fired a third gun.

The shot fell into the water about two cable-lengths abeam, and in the same moment the Greek steersman uttered a loud cry, as if of terror, and let go the tiller.

In an instant the bows of the little xebec flew up into the wind, all her sails shivered, and she began to drift down on the frigate.

"Cut the dogs to pieces!" yelled Mourad, beside himself with fury. "It's our only chance."

As he spoke he flew at the steersman, and, had not the Greek instantly jumped overboard, would have cut him down.

Then he caught the helm, brought the xebec to the wind, and held on his course like grim death, assisted by the fact that St. George, seizing the situation at a glance, had presence of mind enough to run to the jib sheet and hold it to windward till the vessel paid off.

Lafangere, confused by these strange maneuvers, did not understand what was going on till the hum of a round shot passing between their masts told him that this last trick of the Greeks had brought them within range.

"What am I to do?" he called out; for he was alone on deck, St. George being at the jib, Mourad at the tiller, while the Greeks, in a frightened group were watching their comrade in the sea, now swimming for the English vessel.

Mourad looked at the frigate, then at the Greeks, and made up his mind.

"Drive those dogs overboard!" he cried. "They are better away than here. The English will stop to pick them up, and give us time to—Hurry! Here's another shot!"

Again came the flash and boom of the gun, and this time the shot went humming past their stern.

Lafangere looked; understood; drew his saber and rushed at the Greeks.

"Overboard, *coquins*! Swine!" he shouted.

They understood as well as if he had spoken the best Romaic, for he aimed a cut at the nearest, which the man only avoided by leaping over the low bulwarks.

Into the sea they all went, one after the other, preferring the chance of drowning to the certainty of decapitation, and the Mameluke remarked with a grim smile:

"Now, Monsieur Rosbif, if your next shot does not hit us, we shall be out of range in two minutes."

On skimmed the little xebec like a bird, and they noticed that, besides keeping to windward they had drawn ahead of the ship, which had begun the chase broad abeam.

This circumstance favored them in so far that

the ship could no longer try any gun of her broadside, but was restricted to her bow-chaser on one side, unless she lost distance by yawing.

A single gun takes time to reload, and the next shot came so feebly, on account of the long range, that, although it passed over the cabin, it dropped into the water, spent, on the other side of the vessel.

"That is the last shot that reaches us," observed Mourad coolly; and he proved to be right, for the next dropped a cable-length astern, and in ten minutes more they were so far ahead of the cruiser that Mourad called out to St. George:

"I wait for orders, captain, there is room to slip by, now, if you are ready to handle the sails, with our friend from Gascony."

St. George came aft, and it was at once resolved to try running down and passing the frigate.

The only difficulty in the way was the landsman's stupidity of Lafangere, who didn't know the name of a single rope, and misinterpreted everything he heard. However, by dint of patience, they beat it into his head at last that to unfasten and let out a rope gradually while the vessel was turning had the effect of altering the inclination of a sail, and, as they only edged off gradually to the west till they got before the wind, wing-and-wing, the Gascon finally exclaimed:

"Why, it's easy enough after all. I believe I should make a sailor in time."

They were then nearly three miles ahead of the cruiser, running down before the wind with a speed that the Mediterranean xebecs never exhibit so much as when running wing-and-wing, and the huge frigate, with studding-sails set, aloft and aloft, came toiling after them like a cart-horse after a thoroughbred.

As the morning wore on they began to drop her astern, till at noon she was but a speck on the horizon, and vanished into the Mediterranean.

Then Lafangere gave a sigh of relief.

"Now we can go to France all right," he said innocently. "How long will it take?"

St. George, who had relieved Mourad at the helm, shook his head gravely.

"A long time, I fear."

"Why a long time?"

"Because we have no chart, and can only make for Italy and creep along the coast, as people did, hundreds of years ago. My friend, you see the place is full of English cruisers, and we have only three men to work this vessel. You have been up all night and must be worn out. I see only one way for us to do, stand on all day and take down the sails at night. To be frank, by to-morrow night we shall none of us know where we are; and whether we ever get to France depends on just two things—a kind Providence and a favoring wind."

Lafangere looked disappointed.

"I think I'm sorry we ever came to sea," he remarked.

CHAPTER IX.

CAPTURED AT LAST.

THE English brig-of-war Bulldog was standing off and on, about ten miles from Marseilles, a month or so later, when the lookout on the fore royal yard shouted down:

"Sail ho! A lateener trying to run in on the port quarter, sir."

"The deuce she is," quoth Lieutenant-commanding Brown, with a growl of astonishment. "She'll have to be uncommon sharp to do it under our teeth, eh, Munson?"

Mr. Munson, first luff, grinned respectful approval of his commander's speech, and proceeded to put the brig under all sail to intercept the impudent felucca that was trying to run the blockade.

The Bulldog had been put on the outside line of vessels on account of her known speed and it was Captain Brown's boast that not so much as a floating cork could get by him in daylight.

The brig, under a press of sail, soon came in sight of a small xebec that was sipping over the waves with wonderful speed, coming down, wing-and-wing, before the breeze, while the Bulldog was close hauled.

"By Jove!" ejaculated Munson, "it's lucky that fellow isn't a mile further off, captain, or I verily believe he'd slip by us. As it is we shall just shave him, unless he bears up and stands off."

But the little xebec did not seem to feel any fear of the brig, for she continued to stand on, sailing like a witch, and in a quarter of an hour more was not three cable-lengths from the Bulldog's bows, still passing on.

"Why don't he bring to?" muttered Brown amazed. "Does he think that his majesty's ships are not able to stop him? Give him a shot between the masts."

The brig bore up and fired a gun over the xebec, the officers watching her keenly through their glasses.

Only three men were visible on board and Munson exclaimed:

"By Jove, sir, I believe they're Turks."

"Turks or whatever they are, they can't fool

me," quoth Brown angrily. "I do believe they're trying to do it. Square away and give them another gun, Mr. Munson. Knock the sticks out of the impudent hooker."

The xebec had already crossed their bows and was skimming away to the leeward at a rate that promised to take them out of gunshot in a very short time, when this order was given. The Bulldog put up her helm to come round and let fly another gun, the shot grazing the felucca's main-yard, but still she kept on.

"Load the port broadside and bring her to," roared Brown angrily. "If some of you don't hit her, I'll stop the grog of the whole ship's company."

The order was rapidly obeyed, and, as soon as Munson reported, "All ready, sir," the brig yawed and fired a whole broadside of twelve-pound shot at the tiny craft, so impudently defying them.

They heard the snapping of sticks, and, a moment later, down came the huge mainsail of the xebec, which at once ran up into the wind and lay drifting.

"I thought I'd settle your hash," the irate captain growled. "Now let's see what you're made of, to try and pass the Bulldog."

They ran down to the helpless xebec, and saw that she was already settling in the water, while three men in Oriental dress were standing on the deck as if in despair, staring at the wreck of the mainsail.

Five out of the nine guns of the brig had struck the tiny craft, and she was a perfect wreck.

When the three men were hauled from the brig they looked defiantly up, and one of them shook his fist and said something to his companions which made Munson observe:

"It's only a French trick after all. That man's a Frenchman."

"What did he say?" asked Brown.

"He was calling us *sacres coquins*, which in English means, 'confounded rascals,' that's all, captain. The boat seems to be sinking. Hadn't we better pick them up?"

"Certainly, Mr. Munson. Throw them a rope, sir, at once."

But though the brig steered up so as to shave the felucca, and a rope was thrown, none of the three men deigned to notice it. They seemed resolved to sink.

"Lower a boat and take them off," said the captain. "There's something strange in all this. How do they come out here?"

The jolly-boat was lowered and pulled up to the felucca, when a midshipman hailed them:

"Hollo, you, I say, Johnny Crapaud! Do you want to get drowned? Your craft will go down in five minutes. Come into this boat. We don't want to hurt you."

The three men stared angrily at him; but made no answer though they spoke to each other in French.

"The accursed *rosbifs*," said Lafangere, "think that we are afraid to drown, after having escaped all other perils. Let us show them a Frenchman can die anywhere."

"On the contrary," observed St. George, "they mean kindly. We have done all we can to get to France and deliver our dispatches. Let us surrender since we cannot escape, and throw the papers overboard."

"You have no right to destroy them," said Mourad. "They are, as you say, only to the general's wife, and—"

"Therefore the enemy must not read them," answered St. George, firmly. "Well, my friends, I take the responsibility."

He moved to the side of the xebec and cast overboard the packet of letters he had kept so carefully. To his mortification they did not sink at once, and the midshipman excitedly yelled:

"Give way, boys. Save those papers!"

The boat dashed forward and the boy managed to save the white packet just as it was sinking.

St. George watched him and said quietly:

"It is the will of Heaven we should deliver those dispatches, or they would have sunk. It is time we surrendered, comrades."

They made no more difficulty of stepping into the boat, and it was just in time that they did so; for, ere they reached the brig, the xebec went down.

Then they were taken to the quarter-deck of the Bulldog, where Captain Brown—captain by courtesy—received the report of the midshipman and the packet of letters, and observed with an important air:

"Aha, Munson, I thought it was some French trick. These fellows are probably officers in disguise, and, as such, liable to be hung as spies. Important dispatches no doubt. You read their lingo, I believe. You shall translate them when they're dry. Ask these fellows who they are."

Munson obeyed, with more politeness than his commander would have shown, and Lafangere answered:

"As the senior officer present I will tell you. We are French officers, my friend and I, just come from Egypt, with our Mameluke servant Mourad. We are in no sense combatants or dispatch-bearers, our letters being from General Bonaparte to his wife, and, therefore, private."

If you are a gentleman you will return them, or will give us satisfaction for the affront."

Munson translated the answer and the captain burst out laughing:

"Does he think we care any thing for his French monkey notions? Ask him his name and rank, and tell him he will be a prisoner unless the admiral chooses to relieve him."

Munson gave the Frenchman the substance of this speech, and the fiery *maitre d'armes* was much disgusted.

However, he gave the name and rank of his companion, St. George, accounting for Mourad, as before, as their servant, and refused to answer any further questions.

Munson tried to find out how they came there and from whence, but it was all in vain; and he finally reported to his captain that there was something very suspicious about these Frenchmen, at which Brown observed:

"Of course. All Frenchmen are rascals. Put them in irons and we'll signal the admiral. In the mean time dry and read those dispatches."

The three prisoners were accordingly put in irons down in the hold, and the *maitre d'armes* said gloomily:

"It is all over. We shall never see France."

It was Mourad the Mameluke who answered him with spirit:

"On the contrary we shall land there and get to Paris. We have not found our way here alone for nothing."

CHAPTER X.

A DESPERATE ATTEMPT.

FOR some hours the prisoners were left alone down in the hold of the brig with the pleasant odor of bilge-water to console them in their captivity, while the vessel bowled along at a rapid rate as they could tell from the swash of the waves that passed.

The atmosphere was stifling and they all felt more or less dejected, preserving a gloomy silence.

At last a door opened above and they saw the marine sentry standing at a carry, while an officer called down to them in true Anglo-French:

"Vooly vous come up-stairs—I mean ascendy, mousseers?"

The three prisoners rose up and followed the officer between decks, when they saw through an open port that the brig was alongside of a huge line-of-battle ship.

The officer waved them to the ladder on deck, took them to the gangway and pointed to a boat lying alongside.

"Entry, mousseers," he said blandly. "Nooz allong voir Sir Sidney—I mean we're going to see the commodore."

He seemed so proud of his French that none of the three smiled, and they were soon in the boat and rowing to the ship.

The officer followed them up the side-ladder and took them to the handsome cabin, where he saluted a tall, jolly-looking officer who was writing at a desk and said stiffly:

"The prisoners, Sir Sidney. Mr. Brown thinks they're spies, sir, as they had on Turkish clothes and can't talk anything but French, sir."

The English commodore looked up.

"Very good, sir. I'll attend to them. Did they have any papers?"

"Yes, sir. These."

The officer was about to hand his superior the package which St. George had thrown overboard, when the creole, somewhat to the astonishment of his companions, seized them and said to Sir Sidney in French:

"If you are a gallant man, sir, as I suppose, you will not examine those papers. They are private and by no means contraband of war—a letter from General Bonaparte to Madame his wife. I pledge you my honor as a French officer to that fact."

The English commodore looked amazed but he evidently understood French well for it was in that language he answered:

"That is all very well monsieur: but in war nothing is private. Give up those papers and do not compel me to call a guard if you are an officer."

St. George hesitated.

"I know you have the power, monsieur, but I entreat you not to abuse it. The love of a husband for his wife is not a thing to be made a jest of in your English papers."

Sir Sidney seemed to be struck by his remark, for he asked, without insisting on the return of the papers:

"What is your name, sir, and how do you come here?"

"I come from Egypt, monsieur, where I was promoted on the field to be an officer of Guides the body-guard of the General Bonaparte."

"Ah!" said the Englishman with a bright smile. "I have heard of this Bonaparte, though I never saw him. Where was he? In Alexandria?"

"No, monsieur, opposite Cairo, where he had just defeated Mourad Bey under the shadow of the Pyramids. The official news of the battle was sent by the river, but the general permitted me with my two comrades to carry this letter to his wife through the desert to Alexandria,

where we arrived in time to witness a terrible misfortune to our people."

"I know. Nelson licked them all to bits," broke in Sir Sidney in English. "Curse the luck, and I wasn't there! Too bad, too bad!"

St. George waited till he had done and then pursued:

"I should not have told you this news, had I not apprehended you knew it already, for we have been a month on the way here, owing to the English cruisers. I therefore am not exceeding my duty in giving the information."

"But how did you get here?" asked the English officer. "The captain of the brig sends word that you three were alone in a xebec. How did you get from Alexandria? Are you sailors?"

"Never was at sea in my life till I went to Egypt," interrupted Lafangere brusquely.

"But Frenchmen can learn anything."

The English commodore smiled.

"Indeed? Who are you?"

"Lafangere, *maitre d'armes* Seventh Dragoons, at your service, and sailor or soldier as long as the wind is fair."

"And how came you here, monsieur?"

"Faith, simple enough. We hired a lot of rascally Greeks to take us to France, and they tried to sell us to the English. So we drove them overboard and we three have been sailing along ever since, not knowing where we were till we came on that accursed brig of yours, and we could not run from her as we did from the rest. That's all, monsieur."

The commodore listened with a smile of some amusement, and, when Lafangere had finished, turned to the officer in attendance:

"You can go back, sir. Tell Mr. Brown to resume his station. I will take care of these men. They are not dangerous."

The lieutenant touched his hat and departed and Sir Sidney turned to St. George.

"If I give you my honor to conceal the contents of these papers if they turn out to be private, will you let me examine them without troubling me to send for a guard?"

"No, monsieur," returned St. George, firmly.

"I have given you the word of a French officer that these are private property. If you take them by force you are a marauder, and I shall proclaim you such whenever I am exchanged."

The English commodore flushed scarlet.

"Enough. I take that risk. Sentry!"

Before he could say another word the three Frenchmen were on him and had him pinned by the throat in a silent, desperate struggle.

None but trained athletes like them would have dreamed of such an apparently insane undertaking as attacking the commander of a line-of-battle-ship in his own cabin, but circumstances favored them for the moment.

Sir Sidney, a habitually reckless man, was for the moment alone in his cabin, the door shut.

He had only escaped from a French prison himself a few months before, and in his long sojourn had learned to talk their tongue so well that he was proud of it.

In the hope of getting important news from these prisoners he had shut himself in with them, hoping to gain their confidence by apparently generous treatment. Therefore for the moment, he was powerless, and Lafangere whispered:

"Let's kill him; lock the door and blow up the ship before they hear us."

St. George shook his head.

"Lock him in down-stairs," he said. "There is always a trap-door to the store-room under these cabins."

All this passed with speed in silence and in another moment they had bundled the commodore, completely stunned, down into the store-room, and stood alone in the cabin.

"What next?" asked Lafangere briskly. "I feel that I may see France yet."

St. George pointed to the stern windows from whence they could see the harbor of Marseilles with its crowds of shipping.

"We are only two miles off," he said, "and if you can all swim as well as I, we can get there."

He stole to the door and locked it.

"That will give us half an hour. They will think the commodore did it. This ship is in command of the blockaders, and it is near sunset. She will probably go in as close as she dares before dark; for that is the time traders try to get out. Let us be ready to jump overboard if any one comes. At all events I have my papers safe, once more."

They took off their outer garments, made them into bundles, tied them on their heads, and went to the stern windows to look out for a chance.

The setting sun shone directly into the cabin and they waited till they saw it dip under the western horizon and heard the ship's bell strike.

Then came a sharp rap at the cabin door.

"They begin to grow uneasy," quoth the Gascon with a grin. "Let them knock a little more."

After a pause came a second rap, and St. George said in a low voice:

"They will think the commodore is busy as soon as they try the lock and will go away. Get ready."

Pretty soon some one shook the door and they heard a voice call out:

"Please, sir, the captain's compliments and wishes to know if—"

They could not understand the rest, but St. George went to the middle of the cabin and called out:

"No, no, no!"

The answer seemed to satisfy the person at the door for he went away and nothing more was heard till it was quite dark.

All this time the vessel seemed to be lying still; but they could notice that the harbor of Marseilles was much nearer and St. George whispered:

"A current is setting us in. They must have wanted to know if they could not make sail and stand out. That is why I called out 'No, no.' It was the only word of English I could think of. I wonder what has become of our friend down stairs. He is very quiet."

"I took care that he should drop on his head," observed Lafangere dryly. "He is certainly senseless, perhaps dead. Hark! what's that?"

They heard a rush of feet outside and the cabin door bent inward.

"They have found it out at last," cried the creole. "Now is the time."

As he spoke the words he slipped through the narrow port and the three Frenchmen dropped into the sea under the stern of the line-of-battle ship and began to swim for the lights of the city of Marseilles.

They kept perfect silence, a great contrast to the ship-of-war behind them, which re-echoed with shouts while lights ran to and fro, showing that an active search was being prosecuted for the insensible commander and the prisoners.

Presently they heard the rattle of blocks and saw a boat lowered.

"Keep as quiet as you can," whispered St. George. "They can never find us in the dark, and the current is carrying us in all the time."

Pretty soon they heard the dip of oars close by them, and the form of another boat loomed up ahead.

They ceased to swim and it passed by them when they heard a low voice say:

"Arretez!" [Stop.]

"It is our own people," cried Lafangere in a tone of great joy. "Help, comrades, we have just escaped from the English."

The boat stopped rowing and just then the flash of a gun from the ship showed them a long black boat pulling a dozen oars of a side, with the well known blue and red uniforms in the stern.

In another moment they had swum toward it and were being helped in by French marines who hurriedly asked:

"Who are you? How did you escape?"

All answer was cut off by the report of a second gun from the ship, and this time a shower of grape shot flew over their heads, showing that they were seen.

"Pull!" cried the French officer commanding, and away they went toward Marseilles, the English boat coming after them in lively style for several hundred yards, when she apparently thought better of it and turned back to the ship.

Then St. George found time to ask:

"What is this boat, and how came she here?"

"We are the outer guard boat," was the reply. "Whence come you last?"

"From Egypt," answered Lafangere. "We beat the Turks; but the English have beaten our fleet. Only one comfort remains."

"And what is that?"

"That we three at least will see France once more."

"I told you we should," observed the creole.

CHAPTER XII.

A MARCH ON CHESTNUTS.

WHEN the boat touched the steps of the quay in the harbor, our three adventurers had resumed their Oriental clothing, and St. George said to the officer in command of the crew:

"I suppose we ought to report to the commandant of the port. We are officers from General Bonaparte, with letters to Madame, and I have an order on the paymaster here for funds, the English having robbed us of all our arms and money."

The officer shrugged his shoulders and gave a short laugh.

"I fear your order will not be respected as much as it would have been a week ago."

"Indeed, and why not?"

"Because we have had news from Egypt that our fleet is destroyed, which settles the fate of the army and the general. The English commodore outside, Sir Smeat, sent us the news with the usual sarcastic politeness of those English devils, but it is none the less good news for some of our gentry in Paris."

The three friends listened in astonishment, and St. George exclaimed:

"But it is not possible any one in France can rejoice in our misfortune?"

The officer laughed again.

"There are some people here who hate Bonaparte worse than the English and Austrians. I am not one of them; but you will see. I am glad I was able to rescue you. Good-night, messieurs."

Then they found themselves alone on the

quay at Marseilles, escaped from the perils of the sea and enemies, but none the less hungry, cold and penniless in their native land, for they had been robbed of all their money when they were first put in irons on the brig.

"Upon my word, this is a hospitable way to receive escaped prisoners," remarked the Gascon, ruefully. "What shall we do?"

"Report to the commandant," said St. George, promptly. "It is our duty as soldiers. I know the way to his quarters, for I have been here before."

They plodded wearily through the streets till they found the house of the commandant, when the sentry stopped them.

"You can't go in to-night. The general sleeps. The adjutant's office will be open at ten in the morning."

"But we are prisoners escaped from the English, with news from Egypt, and the general will be glad to see us."

"It cannot be done. Stand back."

"But is there no place where we can find shelter for the night? I tell you we are escaped prisoners—officers."

"A likely story! Begone!"

And they had to obey, for the sentry cocked his musket as he spoke, and there is no glory in being shot by one's own people. They wandered round the city till they found an archway, where they were forced to go to sleep like beggars for the night, and Lafangere observed, bitterly:

"If this is the way they treat veterans in a French city, I shall wish I was back in the English vessels again."

"Patience, comrade," answered Mourad. "We are, after all, in France, which I have not seen for twelve years. There is a mistake somewhere. It is night. We don't know the proper place to apply. It will be very different in the morning."

St. George said nothing. He seemed to be in a brown study.

In the morning they found themselves the objects of curiosity to a crowd of small boys, who stared at their Mameluke dresses and threw stones at them from round the corners, but still Mourad remarked:

"That is nothing. They never saw a Mameluke before. Who has any money or anything to sell, so that we can get breakfast?"

But no one had anything, so that they were forced to go without eating till it was time to present themselves at the adjutant's office, which they did the moment the doors were opened.

The adjutant was a rough man, who had risen from the ranks, and was a republican of the old ferocious stamp of ninety-three.

When St. George saluted politely, this person gave a grunt.

"Who are you, citizen? The Republic has no time to waste on bows. Leave that to the emigrants. What do you want, and why are you masquerading in those clothes? Are you a play actor?"

"I am an officer of the Guides, promoted by my general on the field of battle," returned St. George, proudly. "I come from Egypt with dispatches—"

"I know: from that hypocrite Bonaparte, who thinks himself better than any man in France. Well, thank fate, he is gone and the Republic will no longer be bothered with his airs and proclamations."

Lafangere started forward to give a fiery answer; but St. George restrained him with a look and replied calmly:

"I do not propose to dispute with you on the merits of my commanding officer, citizen, but merely to remind you that I also am in the service, that I am an escaped prisoner and that I need money to enable me to get to Paris and deliver my dispatches."

The adjutant sneered.

"Very possibly, but as General Bonaparte does not command this department, you can get none here."

"But I have an order from him to the paymaster-general—"

"It is useless. A week ago we would have honored it. To-day Bonaparte has lost us a fleet and the Republic must take care of itself."

The adjutant turned away, but St. George made a last effort.

"Can we not even procure uniforms from the quartermaster?"

"No. Go to your own department. We have nothing to do with the army of Egypt."

Then they came away and as they went down the steps St. George ground his teeth and said in a low savage tone:

"So much the worse for you all, gentlemen of the Directory. You will rue this when he comes back."

"What do you mean?" asked the Gascon, amazed at hearing St. George, usually so quiet, give way to passion.

The creole smiled in a singular way.

"You will see when he comes back. In the mean time I am going to Paris. It is the month of September and the chestnuts are ripe. Caesar's soldiers lived on roots before the battle of Pharsalia, but they were masters of the world after it."

Lafangere was puzzled.

"What are you talking of, comrade? I have heard of Caesar, but I don't see what he has to do with us, and I am very hungry. I for one, would not be ashamed to go to the first soldier's mess we see and ask a comrade for a share."

"On the contrary," said Mourad, who seemed to be ruminating over the singular treatment they had received, "I agree with St. George that we walk to Paris. I am ready to march."

Lafangere, who seemed to be bewildered by the turn affairs had taken, followed them in silence out of the city and out into the great chestnut woods that abound in the south of France, where they were fain to satisfy their hunger along with the village swine, and Mourad observed:

"God is a great deal kinder than man. We shall not starve on the road to Paris."

They set off on the road and tramped steadily along till nightfall overtook them by the edge of a forest where they found a warm shelter among the leaves in a hollow. Next day they resumed their march and tramped on, finding the roads in a strangely deserted condition.

This was explained to them next day when they were stopped by a party of armed men in all sorts of rags, who asked them:

"Where are you going and who are you?"

St. George answered quietly:

"Officers sent from Egypt by General Bonaparte, with letters to Madame. No one will give us anything to eat and we have no money. Now tell us who you are?"

The leader of the party stared and laughed.

"I thought you were Gipsies. Have you no money at all hidden away? There are too many people now a days trying to play tricks on us to cheat us of our dues."

"You can search us if you will," answered the creole. "We have nothing but this letter and these papers which seem to be of no value now."

The other man took the letter and scanned the direction carefully.

"MADAME BONAPARTE,
Rue de la Victoire,
Paris."

He turned it over and was about to open it when St. George said, quickly:

"Pardon, comrade. It is to a lady and private. No Frenchman will open it."

The other man laughed.

"You are a bold fellow to object. Do you know who I am?"

"No, but I guess."

"Who then?"

"A brigand."

"As you please. None the less, my name is Vidocq and you seem to be a good fellow in distress. Can you handle a sword?"

St. George waved his hand to his comrades.

"This is Lafangere, I am St. George, and this is our friend Mourad, a Mameluke, who has turned Frenchman."

Vidocq uttered a cry of delight.

"You are just in time to join us. We want brave fellows like you. I am a bit of a master myself and I have heard of this Lafangere. Come, you will find France changed in the last three months. The only people that have any chance to-day are we gentlemen of the road. Join us and I have a plan to propose that will enrich us all."

"What is it?" asked Lafangere suspiciously.

"Never mind," interrupted St. George. "It is inadmissible. We are obliged to you for your offer, Monsieur Vidocq, but while the chestnuts are ripe we can live. When all fails we may take to the road for a living. Do you wish to search us?"

Vidocq shrugged his shoulders.

"No, you are evidently poor devils, and besides, I have an admiration for your general. He is the only man who has given us the victory wherever he goes. I am sorry you will not join us. At least come and dine with us. There is no harm in that."

"No indeed," cried Lafangere eagerly: "no harm at all; and I feel as if a change from chestnuts might be acceptable, for it takes a great deal of stooping to find a good meal."

The brigands laughed and took them to a hollow in the woods where they found a regular encampment with fires, women, chickens, pigs, sheep, barrels of wine and all the proceeds of many a successful foray, and learned for the first time that half of France was in a similar condition to the province they were in at the time.

"The white cockades (royalists) are up in Brittany, Schinderhannes holds the forests of Ardennes, Cartouche makes his quarters in Fontainebleau when he's not in Paris, and I thought that I could do no better than live in clover here while the Directory is good enough to leave the police without pay," said Vidocq while they were at dinner. "One must live and it's no good to be a soldier in these times. The soldiers starve; the government officials steal, and the only way a man can live if he has no office is to steal too. You'd better join us, Monsieur St. George. The role of honesty has brought you to rags and chestnuts, while we have good coats and plenty to eat."

But the three friends resisted all solicitations

and as the bandits seemed to be a jolly lot of fellows who had no fear of arrest, they allowed them to pass on, Vidocq sending affectionate messages to his friend, Cartouche, whenever they met him on their way.

That night they slept in a stone quarry and Mourad the Mameluke thoughtfully observed:

"Is it not strange that the only kind words we have heard in France should come from the lips of a thief? I don't know but what I would almost prefer Egypt again; yet I have dreamed of France for twelve years as the sweetest place on earth."

No one made any answer, for they were all very much depressed in spirits, and thus the three adventurers traveled on, the same as the Gipsies, shunned by every one, till they at last reached Paris.

The only consolation they had in their march was that there was no rural police to ask them inconvenient questions or put them in prison as vagrants.

France seemed to have resolved itself in the country into an anarchy strongly resembling that of the dark ages, when every man did what was right in his own eyes, and vagrants wandered abroad at their own sweet will.

They saw evidences of organized bands of robbers in every department, and bordering every high road more than ten miles from a town, and were only saved from constant stoppages by the meanness of their appearance.

The towns within their old medieval walls seemed to be the only refuges of law and order, and into these they did not care to enter for fear of a rough reception.

"By my faith," observed Lafangere, as they at last stood on the top of Montmartre and saw Paris spread below them, "I have always thought it strange that any man should hesitate to kill a vagrant or thief on sight, but I begin to think that even vagrants and thieves may once have been men like us, when I see the way people look at us as we pass."

Mourad sighed deeply as he muttered:

"France is not what I thought it."

In the whirl and roar of Paris they were swallowed up and not noticed as they had been in the villages and country towns, but when they arrived at the Rue de la Victoire and asked a crossing sweeper for the house of the conqueror of Italy the man grinned:

"You're from the country, I see," he said. "Don't you know he's gone to Egypt and the Turks have eaten him up? I'm glad of it for he killed one of my brothers, with his cursed artillery in the Revolt of the Sections."

"But Madame Bonaparte surely lives there yet," suggested St. George.

"Madame? Oh, no. She has bought a fine place in the country that they call Malmaison ten miles from here at least. She is too proud to live in that little house any more, citizens. Helas! what is the use of living under a republic. Here am I, sweeping a crossing, *parbleu*—why, what is your business? Don't hurry away."

But the three strangers were gone and Lafangere was saying:

"It seems as if we should never get a chance to deliver those dispatches. Let us take a look at the city before we go."

They trudged along, Mourad staring at all he saw with such wonder that Lafangere remarked sarcastically:

"One would think you had never been in Paris, my friend."

"No more I have," was the simple reply. "You forget that I was born in Martinique and taken for a slave on my voyage to France. This is the first time I ever was here, yet I can tell every spot I see. I have so often heard my mother talk of it. There, Yonder is the Tuileries, I will wager."

"You say true, comrade, and the five kings rule there now instead of one. What say you, St. George, shall we go in and ask the rascals for our pay? 'Twould be a good joke."

They were in just that careless, reckless state, produced by vagrant life in the fine autumn weather that the suggestion fell in with their humor and the three ragged vagabonds ran up the step past the gorgeous Swiss on guard and asked to see the Directors.

The usher in waiting stared at them as if he thought them crazy but Lafangere cried:

"Jump, rascal, jump; don't you know the people of the republic pay your wages and are we not representatives of the people? Go quick and tell Monsieur Barras that three officers from General Bonaparte are here to see him or I'll know why."

There was something so strange in the appearance of these three wild vagrants that the usher ran away to seek a guard, and St. George improved the opportunity to open all the doors and look in at the gorgeous offices that led into the hall. The others were similarly occupied till they heard the clash of muskets on the pavement and saw the usher pointing them out to a sour-looking lieutenant of Municipal Guards, who cried out, harshly:

"Come, you three rascals, knaves, get out of this, if you don't want to get into the *salle de la police*. This place is not meant for vagabonds like you! Be off!"

And they went out without further trouble, St. George saying in a low voice:
"I've heard enough for us. Come, let us be off to Malmaison."

CHAPTER XII.

THE LETTER ARRIVES.

A LADY, tall, slender and graceful, with brown curls clustering over her forehead, was seated by the open window of a large country house some leagues from Paris, looking out over a beautiful park in the light of an autumn day, when a servant entered, and said:

"Three persons—I should say men—wish to see madame. They say they come from Egypt, but they look like beggars."

The lady started up, her face wreathed in smiles.

"From Egypt! Why do you not admit them at once, Jacques?"

Jacques fidgeted.

"If madame please—they are in rags—and—I fear they are impostors."

The lady looked vexed.

"If they are from Egypt they cannot be impostors. Simpleton, they must have news from the general. Send them here."

Still Jacques hesitated.

"If madame please—they are not fit to come into the saloon. I made them wait outside. They are ragged and dirty, and all they will say is that they want to see madame to give her something. It may be the plague, for all I know, for they say it is raging in Egypt."

The lady, looking still more vexed, stamped her little foot.

"Plague or no plague, I care not, so they come from Egypt. Send them up."

Jacques bowed resignedly, muttering:

"If madame please. I have done all I can to keep them out."

He went down to the hall and opened the door. On the steps outside sat three men in rags, barefooted, dusty, bearded, haggard with fatigue and hunger. They looked as if they had walked a long way, as indeed they had.

"You can come in," said Jacques, gruffly.

"Madame will see you; but if I had my way she would send for the gendarmes and have you arrested as suspicious people."

One of the men, a swarthy Gascon from his looks, laughed.

"If you had your way perhaps, France would be in a pretty pickle."

"She would have no such people as you at all events. It is not because my mistress lowered herself by marrying a Republican that we are to fraternize with tramps," answered Jacques, crustily.

"Holla, citizen, you appear to forget that this is the year Seven of the Republic, one and indivisible," retorted the Gascon fiercely. "Are we fallen into a den of aristocrats here?"

His two companions had said nothing and he appeared to be fully equal to doing all the talking required.

Jacques laughed in a sneering way.

"Your republic has brought things to a pretty pass," he said. "The *sans culottes* are not so strong as they used to be, thank Heaven! and my mistress belongs to the old families."

The Gascon was about to make a hot reply when one of his companions laid his hand on his shoulder and said quietly:

"Hush! Lafangere, we do not bandy words with servants. My friend, you told us madame was willing to receive us. Why do you not take us thither?"

"Why don't you come along then?" retorted Jacques. "Follow me and shut the door after you."

"Pardon me," returned the ragged man in a tone of extreme politeness. "I never do another's duty. Go on, friend, we follow."

Jacques slammed the door viciously and preceded them to the *salon* where the lady came several steps to meet them and then recoiled, murmuring:

"*Mon Dieu!* poor creatures!"

In truth, they looked about as forlorn objects as could be seen in a day's travel. The rags of their Mameluke dresses were covered with hay-seed showing where they had passed most of their nights and their thin unshaven faces looked wild in the extreme, as the lady ejaculated:

"Who are you and what do you wish with me?"

With a strange air of dignity the tallest of the three drew himself up and replied:

"Do I stand in presence of Madame la Generale Bonaparte?"

"Yes, yes, monsieur. What is it?"

"I am the bearer of a letter from the general which would have reached you a month since but for the fortune of war, madame. It is here."

And St. George handed the lady the yellow and water-stained missive which his chief had written under the shadow of the Pyramids at the close of July.

The lady looked doubtfully at it for a moment, then tore it open and cried out hurriedly:

"It is true; it is true. Oh, *mon Dieu*, I have heard from him at last!"

She devoured the letter with her eyes, and

then turned to the bearer with a smile of singular sweetness.

"How can I apologize to monsieur for the rudeness of my servant and my own. You are no doubt the Monsieur Saint George mentioned by the general in his letter. But how is it possible you have not been welcomed and provided with all you need in France? Bearing news of victory, too?"

"Alas, madame," returned the creole sadly, "we bear news of victory on land but of a terrible disaster at sea. On the very day we departed, the whole French fleet was destroyed before our eyes. The general has, it is true, possession of Egypt; but his retreat is cut off and the army can never return to France."

Josephine listened and turned pale.

"Are you sure of this, monsieur?"

"I saw it with my own eyes, madame."

The lady had sunk on an ottoman and murmured half to herself:

"Oh, heavens! what shall we do?"

St. George turned on the old servant Jacques, who was listening with all his ears and said with the utmost politeness:

"My friend, it is the custom of polite society for you to set chairs and retire, as soon as you have introduced visitors. Can you understand plain French?"

Jacques took the hint and went out and then St. George advanced to the lady, who seemed to be perfectly stunned by his news and said gravely:

"Madame possibly knows the general better than I, but I, on my part, have been with him under fire in bad places, and I learned from him never to despair. The army may never return from Egypt, but the general will, and he is worth ten armies. Let madame take courage. We three are on her side and we three can do anything in the world when we are united."

Josephine looked up with a faint smile.

"You are a brave man, monsieur, but you don't know in what a condition these men have plunged France. They are jealous of Bonaparte. They hate him and will do all they can to hurt him with the people, and he is a thousand miles away from home with no one to befriend him here."

"You mistake, madame. He has five friends that I know of, who will work for him as none else can."

The lady looked puzzled.

"Five friends. Who—?"

"First is madame the closest of all."

"Ah, yes, monsieur, but only a woman and so weak!"

"Women are mighty in their love and can do many things men can not."

"Well, monsieur, who are the others?"

"Second are we three, who have made our way hither spite of English foes and French traitors who hate the general. As I told you, we three together can go anywhere and do anything. That is four."

"And the fifth, monsieur?"

"The fifth is fate. Madame is like myself a creole, and has heard of the *voudou*."

Josephine looked interested at once, for she was exceedingly superstitious.

"What do you know of *voudou*?" she asked.

"Madame comes from Martinique. She was once Mademoiselle de la Pagerie. Is it not so, madame?"

Josephine sighed.

"It is true, monsieur. Ah, how happy were those days when I had no care, before I— But never mind. Go on."

"Madame may remember a prophecy made about her when almost a child, by one of the priestesses of the ancient rite."

Josephine shuddered and rose up.

"Yes, I remember. Oh, monsieur, how did you know of it?"

St. George's friends were looking at him in silent amazement, for the lady seemed to be strangely affected.

"Does madame remember the words of the oracle?" asked St. George calmly.

"Well, how well! She told me that I should go beyond seas to be wed; that he I loved should be slain on the scaffold; that I myself should be on the point of death—"

She stopped and hid her face.

"And what more?" asked the deep voice of the creole. "Has it not all come true, so far? Your husband, Beaubarnais, perished on the guillotine, and you were only saved by the death of Robespierre from a like fate. But the oracle said further. Was it not this? 'And after that you shall be Queen of France—ay, more than queen—and the people shall bless your footsteps.'"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Josephine, hurriedly.

"How know you this? Tell no more. For the last is—"

"The last is the fate of all," answered St. George, gravely, "that you should die."

"But in days of rebellion," interrupted Josephine, quickly.

St. George shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"What matters it then? Death wipes out all troubles. Madame has yet a glorious destiny before her. Let these men do with France what they will, till he comes back. They cannot kill Bonaparte. They cannot quench his star."

"In Heaven's name, monsieur, tell me how you know all this?" asked the lady, and as she spoke she laid her white hand on his ragged sleeve with that bewitching smile few, not even the iron-willed Bonaparte, could resist. "You are from Martinique?"

"No, I am from St. Domingo, madame."

"Then how do you know this prophecy?"

St. George turned away his head and looked at one of his companions with a burning glance as he asked in Arabic:

"Shall I tell the truth, my brother?"

Both the lady and Lafangere looked at him in amazement as the third man, who had been standing like a statue all this time, answered in the same language:

"No. She will despise you as I did before I knew you, my brother."

St. George shook his head.

"My part of the truth must be told. Let yours rest where you wish it."

Then he turned to Madame Bonaparte.

"Madame wishes to know how I know this prophecy. It was delivered to me by the lips of the prophetess, and she was—"

He paused, as if almost afraid to speak, and then said, in a low tone:

"—My mother's mother."

Josephine started violently, and then looked at him in a strange way.

"It is impossible," she murmured. "He is as white as I am."

St. George smiled proudly.

"And yet in my veins flows the one drop of blood of the prophetess. Enough, madame, I knew you would not trust me when you knew that I am not all of your race. I will take my leave."

"Stay, monsieur," said Josephine earnestly.

"It is true that when a child I was brought up to abhor all taint of impure blood, but the world and the Revolution have showed me the folly of all that. You are a brave man; my husband trusted you. Be my friend and help me. I trust you as fully as I would my own son, who is now with the general."

A softer light beamed in the eyes of the creole as he asked her gently:

"And will you, a creole, born of the race of the master, trust me as one of your own race, knowing that my mother was a slave and the child of a slave?"

"Certainly, monsieur. I have too few friends now, to throw away any who are faithful."

She held out her hand to the creole who fell on his knees with a sob.

"Then hear me, God of the white man and the black!" he said huskily. "Smite me dead with palsy, and make my name a thing to be cursed by little children, if ever I falter from the general's side and that of this noble lady till the last drop of my blood is shed."

Impressible Josephine was already weeping as St. George rose up, and now she tried to smile as she said:

"It is a compact, messieurs. I know you will be able to help me. Now tell me first how I can help you."

"*Parbleu, madame, la generale*," said Lafangere bluntly. "The first thing is to let us have something to eat, for on my faith when a man has marched from Marseilles on roasted chestnuts and few enough of them he feels as if a good dinner would be a good thing for him."

Josephine, with a face full of concern ran to the bell crying:

"My poor fellows! It is infamous! And how came you in such a plight?"

"*Parbleu, madame*, it seems, since we went to Egypt that France is turned upside down. The general's order on the paymaster at Toulon was laughed at; we had lost all our own money in the sea, and as no one would recognize us in our characters as officers with dispatches we even had to tramp here as beggars."

Josephine made no answer until she had directed the astonished Jacques who had answered the bell to procure a cold dinner at once for "these gentlemen, officers of the general's staff."

Then, when he had disappeared to execute the order she observed brightly:

"Perhaps so much the better. Had they let you pass as officers they might have ordered you somewhere else. As private citizens, no one need know you, and I will supply you with all the funds you need till he comes back. You can repay me then. In the mean time you must take up your abode at Malmaison."

"Pardon, madame," answered St. George, "at Malmaison—that is here—we can do you no good. It is at Paris we must work for the general. As for funds, we three will not starve. I assure you. All we need we can procure as soon as I reach a friend of mine in Paris. We will not trespass on your hospitality after we have dined."

And despite all the lady's remonstrances, but very much to the relief of Jacques, the three ragged adventurers tramped away on the high-road to Paris that evening, causing the old butler to observe to himself:

"We're well rid of them anyhow. I declare I was afraid of the spoons all the time they were here."

Out on the high-road Lafangere asked St. George:

"If it's all the same to you, comrade, I'd like to know where you propose to go?"

"Certainly," was the answer. "I am going to the forest of Fontainebleau."

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE FOREST.

OUT in the middle of the Forest of Fontainebleau a group of a dozen men sat round the smoldering embers of a little fire and talked to each other in thieves' slang.

Said one, a beetle-browed ruffian, with a red mark on his forehead, shaped like a *flur-de-lis* and evidently branded there, many years before, with a hot iron:

"The Directory suits me very well, brothers, since that little devil, Bonaparte, is gone to Egypt. There's more money for us when he is away than when he's home, and I hope he'll die of the plague out there."

"For my part I want to see His Sacred and Most Christian Majesty back," rejoined a second ruffian. "I'm tired of your republic. A pretty republic, where a man can't ask for a purse without having gendarmes come after him! The guillotine is just as bad as the old gallows: I am a man who loves to go to church—"

"Yes; to pick pockets," broke in a third.

"Well, suppose I do, what then? Now there are no crowds for all the churches are shut. To pick a pocket one must have a fine coat and money to go to the theater, where people, moreover, are on the look-out for one. No; I want to see the king and the clergy back."

"King and clergy, indeed," growled the branded man. "You're young, Casse Tete, and you don't remember what devils they were. Look at my face. Galleys for life, you say? Yes, but what for? Do you know?"

"Faith, not I. Did you, too, pick pockets in church, Gros Pierre?"

"Pick pockets in church! no, not I. But I was a peasant, and my man in those days was a marquis—the Marquis of St. George. He had estates in Provence and Normandy, and out in the Antilles. Well, he was a bad fellow, this marquis—"

"That goes without saying," interrupted several voices. "All marquises are bad. Go on, Gros Pierre. To the story!"

"Yes, the story. All you think of is the story, when it was all my life before they sent me to the galleys. I had a sister, and this marquis sent for her to his castle. She was to be married the next day, but she was pretty. So what would you? My lord must be amused, and we were only peasants. He had some law in his favor, and he said he liked the girl. She should stay in the castle and her husband should not have her. I went to the castle and I begged him on my knees—yes, brothers, on my knees—to spare the honor of my family, whose ancestors had been faithful to his for centuries. One of us saved one of the St. Georges from an English ax at the battle of Cressy. Brothers, he only laughed at me."

The sweat stood out on the brow of the convict over the degrading brand, as he told his story, and the roughest became silent, till Casse Tete asked soberly:

"Well, what did you do?"

"I took a knife with me in my bosom," said the convict hoarsely, "and I let him have it then. He stopped laughing."

"Did you kill him?" asked one man.

"No, more's the pity. Had he died, I should have swung and the trouble have all been over. But he got well, and I was sent to the galleys for life. However, I got even with him at last."

"How?" asked Casse Tete.

"In ninety-two, on the tenth of August. I was with the rest."

They understood him then. The tenth of August, 1792, was the day the mob took Louis XVI from the Tuileries and killed the Gardes du Corps.

"Yes," pursued the convict absently. "I had been released from the galleys by the order of the National Assembly on account of my being charged with no crime but stabbing a noble, and I was in the crowd that took the Tuileries. I saw him as I rushed on, with my pike, along with the rest. He knew me, brothers. He did not laugh, then. 'Remember Manon' I said to him as I ran him through, and I laughed in my turn then. But I will admit that he died game. Had we been alone, he might even have got the best of me, for he was a good fighter. But there were too many of us, we of the people. Ah well, those days were good; but they are gone now. The aristocrats are all dead."

"Don't believe it," retorted Casse Tete, in an obstinate tone. "There are as many as ever, only waiting till the Prussians and Austrians come into France, to come with them. The only man that could keep them out is gone away."

"And who is he?" asked Gros Pierre.

"General Bonaparte, *parbleu*. If he were back I wouldn't be here to-day."

"Why not?"

"Because, *parbleu*, I'd go to the wars with

the general. Oh, you may stare. You don't know I was in Italy with him. I can be an honest man on occasion, and I would rather rob an Austrian any day than a Frenchman."

The sentiment was greeted with applause, for of the group in the forest most were deserters from different armies, and the remains of old uniforms were on them, except on the body of the branded man.

"Yes," continued Casse Tete, "a man must live somehow, and when he was here, he took us into the enemy's country and gave us liberty to plunder after a battle. But now, *parbleu*, we're beaten everywhere, and reduced to robbing our own people under this cowardly batch of knaves they call a Directory—hola! Game!"

He broke off as a shrill whistle rung through the forest, the signal of their sentry that travelers worth robbing were coming along the road.

In a moment the men jumped up, with all sorts of rusty weapons.

Carbines, old muskets, long horse-pistols, one or two old sabers, were among them, and they ran off to the edge of the wood that commanded the road to Paris, where they saw a traveling carriage, with four horses coming slowly up a long ascent.

Waiting till it was near by, they rushed out, seizing the horses' heads, and Casse Tete, throwing open the door, peered in.

He beheld two persons inside, a stout old gentleman and a young lady, who shrunk behind her father, and cried faintly:

"Oh, heavens!"

"Don't be alarmed, monsieur; have no fear, mademoiselle," said Casse Tete politely. "We will not hurt you; but we require your money and jewelry. One must live, you know, and the Directory gives a man no chance nowadays."

"But this is infamous," broke in the old gentleman, who had at first remained as if paralyzed by astonishment. "Do you know who it is you have the audacity to stop?"

"*Parbleu*, no, and I don't care," returned the brigand coolly. "Come, no nonsense."

The click of his long horse-pistol as he cocked it caused the young lady to scream out:

"No, no, for mercy, don't kill my father."

As she spoke she actually pulled the old man back into the corner, and stood in front of him.

"You are mad," she exclaimed. "Do you not know that this is Monsieur Rewbell, and that if you hurt us all the power of the police will be upon you?"

Casse Tete uttered a low whistle and drew back.

"*Parbleu*, comrades," he said, "'tis Rewbell, one of the Directors. What shall we do? Let him go!"

"Let him go? No," growled Gros Pierre. "If he be a Director, so much the better. He is the cause of half the trouble in France. Let him pay his way or search the carriage. Who knows? Perhaps the old thief has some of the people's money in there."

The old man would probably have been dragged out in another minute, had not the watchful sentry signaled more people coming down the road from the top of the hill, where three ragged tramps soon made their appearance armed only with long sticks of rough wood, cut in the forest.

As soon as the young lady beheld these men through the front window of the carriage she sunk back by her father, murmuring:

"Oh, heavens, we are lost! Here are more of the wretches."

The old man was trembling all over, and muttered:

"Give them your watch. They may let us pass then."

The girl was drawing it forth, when the three tramps on the top of the hill suddenly gave a yell, and came running down on the robbers, brandishing their long staves with both hands in such vigorous style that Casse Tete cried out:

"Give it to them, comrades."

As he spoke he fired off his old horsepistol hastily, and the other men tried to imitate him but with still less success, for most of their weapons were mere dummies, only meant to scare timid travelers, and the others had been loaded so long they would not go off.

The upshot of it was that the three tramps, who were active and vigorous men, came running down and laid about them with their big clubs in such slashing style that the whole band of a dozen took to flight, to pick up stones.

Then one of the tramps shouted to the postillions fiercely:

"Why don't you run, you fools? Do you expect us to stay here all day?"

The astounded postillions, recovering their senses, laid on the whip, and the carriage rumbled away to the top of the hill, the three tramps running after it, while the robbers, in amazement at the very audacity of the exploit, could only follow at a faint-hearted sort of a trot, and not as if they really wanted to catch any one.

The fact was that they were so astounded at the boldness and especially at the powers of these three tramps, that they were afraid to venture a second assault.

They had but poor weapons, and the three

tramps seemed to handle their long cudgels like masters of arms.

Casse Tete lay senseless in the road, Gros Pierre had an arm broken, and the lesser fry were not anxious to make any further acquaintance with such ugly customers.

As soon as the carriage reached the top of the hill, Monsieur Rewbell looked out of the back window, and called out:

"Get on, my friends. Get on."

It required no second invitation, for a long descent was before them, and the three tramps jumped up, two behind and one on the box.

When they had got to the bottom of the hill the robbers were out of sight, and one of the tramps called to the postillions:

"Halt! that will do. We want to get off."

The carriage stopped, and he got off and came to the door, where he bowed with the grace of a gentleman, saying:

"I hope mademoiselle will excuse our peculiar method of proceeding; but there are half a million of francs in gold under the seat of that carriage. We don't wish to be greedy, but we must request that you furnish us twelve thousand francs, which the nation owes us for money lost in its service."

Monsieur Rewbell fell back in his seat in mingled anger and terror.

"*Mon Dieu*, Claire," he exclaimed, "they are worse robbers than the others."

"Pardon me, no," replied the tall tramp. "We are officers from the army of Egypt. We are refused everything when we come home, because we serve General Bonaparte. The money under that seat belongs to the treasury, and you are taking it home to your house, monsieur. We want our pay now. If you are wise, you will hand it out. Then you can drive on."

Monsieur Rewbell looked at them in a doubtful way; then dived under the seat, fished out two leather bags, and threw them to the tall tramp.

"There it is. Now let us drive on," he said.

"Thank you, monsieur, but not till I have counted the money," was the cool reply.

CHAPTER XIV.

MADemoiselle CLAIRE.

WHEN Monsieur Rewbell heard the cool reply of the tramp he became at once confused, and stammered:

"It is needless. I made a mistake. There are only five thousand francs in each bag. Here, take another. That is more than you asked."

"By no means, monsieur," replied the other. "I wish you to understand that we are not robbers, but soldiers who have lost their money in the service of the State. I will take only what we lost," and he quietly proceeded to count out the requisite sum from the third bag, the postillions sitting still on their horses as men who had no interest in the matter.

When he had finished he emptied the rest into Mademoiselle Claire's lap, and drew back with a bow, saying:

"You are now at liberty to proceed. Had we not rescued you, the gentry in the forest would have taken all, and perhaps insulted mademoiselle. I trust you will remember that in extenuation of what is, I admit, questionable conduct on our part, only justified by necessity."

"You are three robbers," answered the old Director, viciously, "and I shall yet have the pleasure of seeing you guillotined, I hope, all three of you."

But Mademoiselle Claire bestowed a sweet smile on the tall tramp.

"I think you have been very polite," she said, "and I think you are unreasonable, my father; for any one can see these gentlemen are only in disguise. Farewell, messieurs."

She sunk back in her corner, the door was closed, and the carriage rattled away, leaving the three tramps in the road by the side of the forest.

Then Lafangere burst out laughing.

"Upon my word, St. George, this is a pretty adventure for an officer of the French army. Do you know we have become footpads, all of a sudden?"

"In war all things are fair," rejoined the creole. "We came back to France, as you know, penniless, and what was our reception? We were denied even the smallest recognition; treated as strangers; the general's order dishonored. We had to cross the breadth of France in the character of beggars, and in the mean time, here are these five kings, who call themselves Directors, stealing the people's money. Do you know how I suspected he had that gold under the seat of his carriage?"

"No. I have been puzzling over that ever since you told us you were coming to Fontainebleau. How did you get scent of it?"

"Simple enough. You remember when we went to Paris to find the general's house?"

"Of course."

"And how we went to the Government offices to see if we could get justice?"

"I remember that too."

"Well, while we waited in the hall, I heard the secretaries talking and one of them said to the other 'I hear the returns from Dijon are

late, and Monsieur Rewbell has gone to collect them." The other laughed and said: "They are always late. He has a way of stopping at Fontainebleau that costs the nation a good deal of money." That was all, but putting it together with what I had seen and heard on the way from Marseilles, I came to the conclusion that this Rewbell is systematically plundering the treasury, and that he passes through Fontainebleau, where he has a house in the town, to hide his plunder and make his accounts straight."

"But the others must suspect."

"Of course, and probably they share in the plunder. So I resolved to try our chance with monsieur, and it seems that others have the same idea."

Here Mourad, who had been silent all the way, burst out:

"Oh, France! What a state she is in. It seems as if robbery were the rule, honesty the exception."

"And so it will be until the general comes back," said St. George gloomily. "But we at least have only taken our own. Now comes the question, where shall we go, and what shall we do?"

"I am in favor of going back to Egypt," said Mourad decidedly. "We shall be with the general there."

"I, on the contrary," observed Lafangere, "am determined to go to Paris, and wait for him till he comes."

"Why?" asked St. George.

"Because in Paris a man who has a good head and a stout body can always live, and we can do what we promised Madame la Generale, helper and watch over her interests."

"I am in favor of Lafangere's plan," put in the creole. "In Paris we are near the central government, and can find the opinions of the people. I am of opinion that this state of things can only end in one way."

"And what is that?" asked Mourad quickly.

"In the restoration of the king?"

"No, no, the French people need no kings. We need the best man in the world, and he is General Bonaparte."

Mourad shrugged his shoulders.

"On my word, you seem to idolize this General Bonaparte."

"So will you, some day. He is the only man who can put France at the head of Europe."

Lafangere turned away impatiently.

"Will you two always talk this tiresome politics? I will tell you what is more to the purpose. You, St. George, are always on the look-out for news, but you have missed what will serve us better than anything else."

"And what is that?"

"There is to be a grand meeting of the sword-masters in Paris in three weeks from tomorrow, and the Directors are to give prizes for saber and rapier. I, for one, intend to be there."

Mourad brightened up.

"For the saber, you say?"

"Yes, there is a long list of prizes, and one for the best feats with the saber on horseback."

The Mameluke turned to St. George with animation and exclaimed:

"Let us go at once. We three can win the best prizes between us, and after that our future is secure, till the general comes back. I am, it is true, in favor of the king, if we can get him; as Lafangere, here, is in favor of the Republic, without Directors; but we three can unite in one thing at least."

"And what is that?" asked the Gascon in a doubtful sort of tone.

"In serving the general till we can get our own way, and in advancing our own interests by sticking together."

"Mourad is right," said St. George in a decided tone. "Together we can do anything, but, if we quarrel, we are nowhere. Let us agree to drop all political ideas save one, to stick together till the general comes. And now let us go to Paris, for our purses are full once more."

CHAPTER XV.

MONSIEUR ST. GEORGE.

THE season of 1798-9 was as gay as usual in Paris. What mattered it that the French had lost the Italy won for them by Bonaparte; that the barbarous Russians of Suwarow had driven the veterans of Montenotte and Lodi back into Provence; that all Germany was menacing the Republic; that the treasury was empty and the State in debt a hundred millions; that bandits swarmed on the high-roads, while footpads demanded purses under the shadow of Notre Dame: so long as the Directors received their salaries and there was money for the entertainments at the Tuileries!

Paris was as gay as ever, and the balls of the Directory still gayer.

To be sure, under the surface of gayety a great deal of trouble was gathering, and it was the thickest of all in Paris, then, as now, center of the nation.

It culminated in the clubs, for Paris has always had club ever since the Revolution of '93 which was made by the clubs.

France was divided into two great parties, with a small third one, that kept very quiet and was looked on with contempt by the others,

though it turned out in the end to have a whole people behind it.

The first party was the Reds, the men of '93, who regretted the abolition of the ever-present guillotine of that year, and believed in the divine right of the people of Paris, as represented by any mob that could be gathered in an hour or two, to change the government of all France at the point of the pike whenever they pleased.

These people had been quiet since the celebrated Revolt of the Sections, when the young general of artillery had mowed them down with his grape-shot, but, now that he was away in Egypt, they began talk of sounding the tocsin again and reviving the guillotine to crush out the second party.

This second party was composed of people who had lost social position and property in the Revolution, nobles, priests, people with a "de" to their names; and a good many tradesmen who wanted a court again. Since the return of law and order, this party had risen to considerable importance, and its boldness had increased so far that the gentlemen even put white cockades in their hats, a proceeding that would have insured them the guillotine five years before.

But the Directory, being in favor of law and order, permitted no Red Republican to drag any white cockade he pleased before a tribunal of safety.

And moreover the Tribunal of Safety had been abolished.

So that the Whites and Reds had to be content with scowling at each other and seeking every pretext to indulge in duels.

The spread of dueling was assisted by the Red and the White clubs, which met in every quarter of Paris, in numbers of from fifty to a hundred people in each club.

The gentlemen with white cockades went to their clubs to drink champagne and Burgundy, while they sung, "*Oh, Ri hard! oh, mon roi!*" and other royalist airs. They were all well-dressed and had money.

The men of the Red clubs drank *vin ordinaire* at ten cents a bottle, and bellowed the "*Marseillaise*," "*Ca Ira*," and other like melodies under the windows of the "Whites" whenever the patrol was coming down the street.

By this means they accomplished two objects. They irritated the "Whites" and prevented retaliation at the time for fear of the patrol. The Marseillaise was still a legal air and "*Richard, oh, mon roi!*" was not.

But they could not prevent single encounters between hot-blooded members, and in fact that was just what they wanted to provoke.

Outside the barriere Montmartre there were affairs daily, at sunrise and sunset, and, when the moon was at the full, they kept them up all night.

They had these affairs with all sorts of weapons, and between all sorts of people; for the "Whites" had ceased to be squeamish on the subject of blood in any sense.

A duke of the old peerage, if he felt himself able, would fight a butcher with the cleavers fresh from the slaughter-house.

It reminded one of the days when knights fought with battle-axes, only these modern combatants had no armor and the contests were more sanguinary.

But, after all, the usual weapons were small swords, because the Reds did not like to be taunted with inability to use the weapon of the aristocrat, and insisted that they were just as good men as the others in every respect.

From which cause a great many Reds bit the dust beyond the barrier; for, as a matter of fact, they were not as good swordsmen as the "Whites."

During this winter the third party of which we have made mention kept very quiet.

Many people did not know that it existed at all; for no one acknowledged openly that he belonged to it.

This was the party that looked to the return of General Bonaparte for a solution of all the troubles under which France groaned.

So far as known, only one man in Paris belonged to this party, and he was a creole, who was frequently seen at the public festivals of the Directory in attendance on Madame Bonaparte.

Poor thing! In those days the creole was about the only attendant she had, for every one in office or who hung on the skirts of office looked coldly at her, or pretended not to see her.

Nevertheless this gentleman was as faithful and devoted in his attentions as if she had been an empress and he her chamberlain.

He went by the name of Monsieur St. George, was exceedingly handsome; lived, no one knew how; dressed with simple elegance, and was said to be a great favorite with Mademoiselle Claire Rewbell, daughter of the Director who was certain to go out in the autumn and who was privately said to be feathering his nest before leaving in view of that contingency.

Mademoiselle Claire and the creole gentleman were always together when the latter was not attending on Madame Bonaparte, and people said she was a fool to bestow so much time on one who might possibly have been rich before the St. Domingo troubles, but whose estates

were certainly deserts, now that the slaves were all set free and would not work.

However, Monsieur St. George went on the even tenor of his way, and seemed, somehow, to have wound himself into the good graces of Rewbell senior, with whom he actually went, on more than one occasion, in his own carriage traveling to Dijon.

In fact it was whispered in some quarters that Monsieur St. George was a police spy or a desperado whom Monsieur Rewbell hired to protect him on his journeys to Dijon, in the notoriously unsafe condition of the roads outside of Paris.

However that might be, Monsieur St. George was the only man in Paris—in society that is—who openly proclaimed that he believed General Bonaparte would yet return from Egypt, and that, in such an event, the people would certainly elect him a Director, if not Dictator of France for life.

And though a good many people would have liked to strangle St. George for saying this, no one ventured to try the operation, for this creole had the reputation of being *mauvais homme*—a bad man to handle.

One evening in the month of August, 1799, the Directory had an unusually brilliant *fete*, and Madame Bonaparte had come as usual with her cavalier, though she looked very pale and languid, and took refuge on a couch in an alcove of the grand saloon.

"Do not let me keep you," she said in a low tone to her escort, who lingered near. "Find Claire and tell her to come to me. I must know if this news is true."

"I have told you it is impossible, madame," he answered in the same tone. "The general is not a fool, to rush to the assault of a petty town like a common soldier."

"Yet he led a charge at Arcola," she whispered, very pale.

"That was different. The Austrians had us, and it was life or death to break them. But here is a petty Turkish town that any officer of grenadiers can assault, and which is not important in any sense to the army. I will stake my life, madame, that this report is only a malicious lie, invented by the Directors to answer their hopes."

"At least seek Claire," she urged. "I shall feel easier."

He bowed and went across the ball-room to where Claire de Rewbell, her pretty face dimpled with smiles, sat playing with her fan and listening to the nonsense of a fair-haired young man called Bottot, secretary to Barras, one of the Directors, and watching the advance of the creole.

A look of intelligence between the tall handsome creole and the lady passed like a flash, and Mademoiselle Claire said archly:

"Now, Monsieur Bottot, I am going to ask you the greatest of all favors."

The young gentleman jumped up, eager and alert, in a moment.

"It is done, mademoiselle. What is it?"

"It is to leave me."

"Ah, you are cruel!"

"Only to take a message for me."

"That is different. To whom?"

"To Madame Bonaparte."

Bottot's countenance fell.

"I don't like Madame Bonaparte."

"Then you don't like me, for I positively adore her."

Bottot made a grimace.

"Besides, she is out of favor. One loses caste by speaking to her."

Claire's eyes flashed.

"Enough, monsieur. You are speaking of my dearest friend."

Bottot looked sulky.

"Well," he said, hesitatingly, "I will, of course, take the message if you wish it, but I don't like to do it in this ball-room. To be frank, mademoiselle, if Monsieur Barras sees me, I shall get a scolding."

"Well, and can you not stand a scolding for my sake?" she asked archly, at which the young man, entirely subdued, murmured:

"I would do anything for you. What is the message?"

"Tell madame simply this: the news is false. That is all."

"But what news?"

"That is no affair of yours. When a lady honors you with a commission, it is for you to execute it without asking questions."

Bottot bowed rather coldly, but went off, and St. George, who had been watching this little comedy from a short distance off, came up and observed quietly:

"You seem to be in trouble with our young friend, mademoiselle. Does he begin to chafe at the curb, or is it the spur that he needs?"

Claire looked down at the floor.

"I don't know," she murmured, "if I am not a fool to take so much trouble on your account, when you show me so plainly that it is all trouble in vain."

He took a seat beside her with the easy grace of a privileged person, and asked:

"What is the matter now? Have any of these people been inventing stories about me to tease you?"

"They only see what I see for myself," she answered in a low voice.

"And what is that?"

"That you care more for a word of Madame Bonaparte than for my best efforts to please you. You only use me to gain news for her and—"

"In short," he replied as she hesitated, "you think that I am in love with madame? Well, I admit that she is a charming person, with a singular grace about her that is rarely found, except in her race; you know we are both creoles."

His large dark eyes were watching the changing color of the girl as he spoke, and a smile was on his lips.

Claire tapped the floor with her little foot in a nervous way.

"You are laughing at me," she said with the tears in her eyes, "and I do not deserve it."

"But indeed you do," he replied gravely.

"Why, monsieur?"

Her tone was cold and injured.

"Because," he answered, still more gravely, "you permit yourself to be swayed by the falsehoods of people you know to be her enemies and mine. You are the only person in Paris, Claire, that knows me as I am. Do you permit yourself to think that I, who adore my general, would cherish a single thought other than respect toward my general's wife—a woman sanctified by her misfortune? Some one has been trying to poison your mind against me. I know who it is—"

"No, you do not," she interrupted eagerly, "I swear to you that this foolish Bottot does not so much as influence a single thought."

"No, but Bottot's master does, the Director Barras. What did he say to you?"

He spoke to her as if she were a child, he her teacher, as indeed he was, in the art of love; for it needed no spectacles to see that Claire was over head and ears in love with the handsome creole. All Paris could see it, and Paris seldom makes mistakes in affairs of the heart.

St. George knew his power and used it.

Claire blushed deeply and looked ashamed.

"It is nothing, after all," she murmured.

"and I don't think Monsieur Barras knew I was within hearing when he spoke. It was to-day at our house, when my father and he were talking business before the meeting."

"Yes, and what passed?"

There was a slight tremor in the creole's voice, for he was very eager to know.

"They were talking of the rumors in the English papers that Bonaparte had been killed in the assault on St. Jean d' Acre, and Barras laughed and said: 'That is not possible, for I have received dispatches from him since then, which tell me that he is master of all Palestine. But that is not the worst of it. The little rascal has the impudence to tell me in his letter, that, if the news in the papers is true, and the kings are marching against France, he will return to Europe at once. Fancy his impudence! He will return without orders?'"

"Well," said St. George, "was that all? What said your father?"

"Oh, he tried to excuse Bonaparte, and even said that he would be glad to see him back to reorganize the army, which was falling into disrepute in Italy."

"Oh! he had the courage to say that? Well, what answered Barras, who thinks that he rules France by right of brains?"

"He retorted on my father, 'Oh, yes, you think I don't know you are one of his creatures, since you have saved so much money. I know all about this brave St. George, who has made a convert of you by means of your daughter, at the same time that he makes love to Madame Bonaparte. If you are not a fool you will send this creole packing, or you will find yourself in a bad box.'"

"Did he say that?"

"Yes."

"Do you think he suspects that I am on the staff of the general, and receive news from him by Mourad?"

"He knows you are of the general's party. No one can help that, to hear you talk so openly in his favor."

St. George fell into a fit of thought, from which he was roused by Claire's voice, timidly asking:

"Emil, is it true?"

"Is what true?" he retorted absently.

"Is it true that you have only played with me and that you make love to Madame?"

He looked at her with a singular mixture of tenderness and railery:

"Little jealousy! If I were making love to Madame Bonaparte, should I plot to bring back the general? Claire, you are like a lake of clear water. One can see the white sands of purity in the depths of your soul. I am, it is true, like the turbid sea after a storm, not so easily fathomed; but I swear to you that I love you more than any one in this world, and that my only object in bringing your father to our side is to secure his safety from the storm that is gathering. France is coming to a tempest, and only one man can save her. That man is my general."

"But he is in Egypt and cannot get back, for the English hold the seas."

"All England cannot prevent him coming back when he wishes. You do not know my general, Claire. He is a demigod among these pigmies. But come, we have quarreled enough for one evening. Tell me you trust me."

"Ah, you know I do when you are near me, Emil. But when you are away and I hear things—"

"Answer them in your heart thus: 'He trusts me with his life; I will trust him also!' We must wait, Claire. When he comes back all will be well again, and in the mean time believe that I love you always. See, here is Bottot again. Now you shall see I am more generous than you. I know he is in love with you yet I trust you with him. Find out all you can for me."

He rose and went away as Bottot came bowing up to her and the girl murmured:

"Yes, it is easy to trust when one does not care; but I—I am desolated with jealousy."

Then she watched the creole join Madame Bonaparte and sighed as she looked.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GUILLOTINE CLUB.

THE Guillotine Club was in session at No. 419 Rue de Tabac, and the president had put on his red cap, an example followed by all the members, each of whom had a glass of red wine before him on the table, flanked by a black bottle.

It looked very imposing and was also very cheap; for the wine was only worth half a franc a bottle or ten cents American coin.

The Guillotine Club had the reputation of being the most ferocious "Red" club in Paris, and the violence of its speeches was proverbial, though its members rarely went to the barriers for affairs of honor.

They wished for the restoration of "Madame Guillotine," as they fondly called her, and did not believe in giving the accursed aristocrats any chance to perforate the bodies of the sovereign people. In the coarse but expressive phrase of the journalists of Chicago, "they were waiting for a sure thing."

The Guillotine Club was not composed of soldiers, and some of its members gloried in the fact that they had never been out of Paris.

"The enemies of the Republic can best be met here, citizens," remarked Jacquot, the tailor, "and I am in favor of securing the rear of the army, as we did in '93, by killing all the sneaking aristocrats who act as spies for the hordes of despotism."

So Citizen Jacquot stayed at home along with twenty six other tailors, fourteen citizens, who cobbled shoes for a living, thirty grocers, a dozen bakers, one butcher, and Citizens Georges and Gascon.

Citizens Georges and Gascon were new men who had been admitted to the society only a few months, but they had acquired a reputation which was very useful to the club.

Whenever any of the members had an affair with one of the "Whites," it was the invariable custom of the club to hold a meeting and consider whether the dignity of the sovereign people would not be imperiled by sending a representative to the barrier, when he might be killed. In most cases the club decided that dueling was a remnant of barbarism, and that it would be better to go in a body at night and break the windows of the "White" who had insulted their member, instead of allowing the duel to take place.

The result of this was that the "Whites," in a mean spirit of revenge, used to call the members of the Guillotine Club "cowards" whenever they met them alone, and some even went so far as to spit on them in public in broad daylight on the streets.

It was Citizen Gascon who broke through this custom the very night after his initiation, by refusing to obey a vote of the club, going out to the barriers to meet a famous fighting "White," called the Count de Brissac, and running him through the body at the second pass with an ease and dexterity that showed him to be an old hand at the sword. After that, whenever a member was insulted by one of the "Whites," he used to tell Citizen Gascon, and Citizen Gascon invariably hunted up the offender, went to the barrier with him and pinked him.

So that the Guillotine Club gained a reputation for fighting, and Citizen Gascon became a great favorite.

There was even talk of making him the president; but he refused the honor, and only asked permission to bring in a friend of his to assist him in his duties of general champion.

The club received the new member with enthusiasm. He was a tall, dark man, who was introduced as "Citizen Georges," and said very little in meeting.

But he was always ready to volunteer for a duel, and had a peculiar parry of his own by which he almost always disarmed his adversary whenever he had an affair. He was very polite in his demeanor, much more so than Citizen Gascon, who had the rough manners of a soldier, and had been known to call the president of the club an "old fool" when he asserted that "dueling was an evidence of cowardice; that it re-

quired more courage to refuse a challenge than to accept one in these times."

"That's all very well," Citizen Gascon once said in open meeting, "but, to my thinking, it requires very little courage to submit to be kicked. The smallest dog will do that, and then run away."

"That is the argument of physical force appropriate only to the dark ages," said the president on that occasion. "No man has any right to kick his fellow-man."

"But, they do it," retorted obstinate Citizen Gascon, "and as long as I understand the *savatte* I shall kick back."

The *savatte* is a way of fighting in which the art of kicking is reduced to a science.

On the night of the Directory ball at the Tuileries, President Jacquot took his seat at the head of the long table—in fact on it, for Jacquot had got so used to sitting with his legs crossed that the club granted him that privilege—and he cried out in his most imposing voice:

"Citizens, the session has commenced. Let us open with the usual toast. Stop! where is Citizen Gascon?"

"He is at the barrier!" cried a dozen voices.

"He will be here at ten of the night."

"Very good. Are your glasses full?"

"All full, citizen."

The members raised their glasses and the president said oracularly:

"To the memory of Madame Guillotine. May we have her back before the snow falls!"

"Amen!" cried the twenty-six tailors in a piping chorus, while the grocers, bakers, cobblers and the solitary butcher growled:

"Down with the aristocrats."

Then they drank off their glasses at a gulp, and the butcher observed:

"In ninety-three we had real blood in the glasses. Ah, what a pity those days are gone! Never mind. We'll have them back."

"Has any one seen Citizen Georges to-night?" asked the president, looking round.

"I am here," answered a quiet voice as Citizen Georges entered the room. "What is required?"

"The club has just learned from Citizen Poirier, the cobbler, that the aristocrats of the Dauphin Club, in the next street, are to have a grand banquet to-night. We have not taken a vote on the subject, as the formal meeting has not opened, but it is proposed that we spoil their fun for them by breaking the windows."

"I am opposed to any such thing," remarked Citizen Georges quietly.

There was a murmur of surprise.

"Opposed! Why?"

Had any other member said as much, a dozen "Guillotines" would have been on their feet at once, howling: "Coward!" but it was not thought prudent in the club to call either Citizen Georges or Citizen Gascon a coward to his face.

Only the president could do that, in a strictly parliamentary sense and in the abstract, in saying that dueling was cowardly.

President Jacquot now repeated the murmur of the club officially, by saying:

"Why are you opposed?"

"Because, to break the windows of a party of people at dinner is cowardly, and you are sure to run away as soon as you have done the deed," answered Citizen Georges.

President Jacquot blew his nose.

When the president of the Guillotine Club blew his nose, which he did with a noise like the blast of a horn, it was a signal that the debate was about to open.

Citizen Georges quietly took his seat and allowed his glass to remain before him.

Then Citizen Gigot, the orator of the club, and a man who mended shoes in very superior style, rose up in his place and blew his nose also.

"The Citizen Gigot is about to address the meeting. The citizens will preserve order," proclaimed Jacquot.

Gigot looked around him with fire in his eye, and began:

"Which of you, citizens, has not suffered from the accursed aristocrats who to-day return to fasten their hungry fangs in the vitals of exhausted France? Which of you has not been forced to pass in the streets the hated white cockade, flaunted in our faces by the insolent tyrants who think that their time has come once more? Only to-day, I, Pierre Gigot, of the sovereign people, passing along the street, received a splash of mud in my eye, citizens, in that eye—given me by France that I might see the glorious tri-color. And whence came that mud, think you? Whence came that mud?"

"From the broom of a sweeper," suggested the president. "Those rascals think it fun to pretend to be hard at work."

"No, no," shrieked Gigot, waving his arms wildly. "I could have borne that; for a sweeper is my brother, he is one of the people—though I admit, Citizen President, that some of them are very insolent to sober citizens who own their shops, *parbleu*—own their shops, and can pay for their bottle of wine. No, it was no sweeper. It was from the carriage wheels of a vile aristocrat, and his coachman had a white cockade on his hat. Are we slaves once more, that we are to be blinded by these minions of tyranny with mud from the chariots of their

luxury? No, to arms, citizens. Form your battalions, and march on till their impure blood gluts our sewers."

Citizen Gigot's effort was rewarded with a burst of howls, and the whole club roared the Marseillaise chorus, from which he had made so apt a quotation, till he waved his hand for silence, and proceeded:

"These aristocrats have a banquet in the very next street, and I have a big stone ready for them. Here it is."

He showed a huge cobble-stone tied up in a napkin, and in a moment every man in the club, except the president and Citizen Georges started up with a similar stone.

"Now put it to the vote, Citizen President," cried Gigot excitedly, "and let us see who in this club will oppose the will of the sovereign people in this matter."

Every one looked at Citizen Georges, but he sat still and said nothing.

"Has Citizen Georges any opposition now?" asked Gigot sneeringly.

"No," answered the other, dryly. "I see it is no use. But I warn you that you will have to do your own fighting in case the 'Whites' turn the tables on you."

His remark produced an uneasy silence broken at last by the president.

"Does the citizen think the 'Whites' know of our plan to break their windows?"

Citizen Georges shrugged his shoulders.

"You have made enough noise about it, and I heard, up at the Tuileries, that they had applied for a guard to-night."

"Ah, bah, the guard won't shoot," said Gigot carelessly. "The Directors wink at these things. It would be different, indeed, if that little devil Bonaparte were here. He was a bad one."

"How do you know he will not be here very soon?" asked Georges.

"He will never come back. The Turks have picked his bones," growled the butcher, "and I am glad of it, for he was too stuck-up for me. He did not own his master, the people."

The president rapped on the table.

"We are not discussing General Bonaparte, who is moreover, an excellent republican. The question is, shall we break the windows of the Dauphin club to-night?"

"Yes, yes!" shouted the members wildly, and just at that moment the door opened and Citizen Gascon made his appearance, with a smile on his swarthy face, and cried out:

"What is the question? I wish to vote. I have just spoiled the fencing of one of the 'Whites' for six months—Baron Grogard—split his sword arm open. What's the question?"

The president explained it, and Citizen Gascon brought down his fist on the table with a bang.

"No, *parbleu*, no!" he cried. "Do you suppose we came here to have you pick quarrels for us, you accursed pack of scoundrels! When I took you up, *sacrebleu*, you were the butt of Paris, making our grand Revolution a farce with your cowardice and boasting. You break windows indeed! Why, do you know if you dare to think of such a thing, I'll go to the Dauphin Club myself, and tell them to sally out on you, sword in hand? These men wear swords, I tell you, and know how to use them. If you break their windows, you do it alone. My comrade and I will leave the club."

And as Citizen Georges left his place and came and stood beside his friend, the club began to hesitate, and the president cried:

"Let us have the noes, then."

Georges and Gascon cried out "no" loudly, and then, one by one, the members of the Guillotine Club laid aside their cobble-stones and sat down, each saying "no," in the feeblest of audible tones.

"The proposition is lost," proclaimed Citizen Jacquot, with as much dignity as though he had not secretly favored it. "Any other proposition is now in order."

Up jumped Gascon in a moment.

"Very well, citizens," he cried. "Since you have listened to reason, my comrade and I have a proposition to make. We will all go in a body to the Dauphin Club, sword in hand, and make them sing the Marseillaise. Who dares follow us?"

There was a dead silence, and then Citizen Gigot got up and said decidedly:

"I shall vote 'no.' The citizens of the republic pay the soldiers to do their fighting. If ever an enemy marches on Paris, my blood will be the first to be shed at the barricades; but to engage in a brawl like this is an offense against the majesty of the people. I will not countenance such an outrage."

Citizen Gascon laughed, and turned to his friend, who was smiling slightly.

"Come, comrade," he said, briskly, "there is no fun for us here. I have fought my last duel for this club. The spirit of ninety-three is dead, and you are right."

Citizen Georges got up and bowed low to the president, observing:

"I told you that you were only brave enough to break windows and run away. Good-night."

Then the two friends strolled carelessly out of the room amid a dead silence, and no sooner

were they fairly out of hearing than Citizen Gigot burst into an impassioned speech on the infamy of concealed aristocrats sneaking into the clubs of the sovereign people, and proposed that a formal vote of expulsion should be taken at once on "the two cowards who had just departed."

The vote seemed likely to follow the speaker, for the Guillotine Club's spirit was up in arms, when President Jacquot said:

"I think that our brother Gigot overlooks the fact that these two men are expert with all sorts of weapons. Let us adjourn the debate till to-morrow night, and break the windows of the Dauphin Club to-night."

This proposition was received with cheers, and the Guillotine Club proceeded to execute its plan, so far as leaving the room was concerned, but, once in the street, a strange hesitancy, not to say timidity, disclosed itself.

They did not march in a body as usual, singing the Marseillaise and "Ca Ira."

"No," said citizen Gigot, "to succeed in our glorious undertaking, we must be wary and discreet. Let us advance silently one at a time, so that the patrol may not notice a gathering, and collect under the windows of the accursed aristocrats in half an hour. Then strike for liberty!"

The proposition was so wise and full of subtlety that the Guillotine Club dispersed in silence, very much like a gang of thieves. Half an hour later the gentlemen of the Dauphin Club, over their wine, were startled by a single stone crashing in at the window, and rushed down the stairs, sword in hand, to find a tall gendarme holding a small bandy-legged tailor by the collar.

"This is the ruffian, citizens," he said. "He was running away when I caught him. I know him well; it is Jacquot the tailor."

"What shall we do to him?" asked one of the revelers, jestingly.

"Kill me, aristocrats," cried the little man in a dramatic tone. "Lead me to the scaffold. I am ready to die."

"You are not worth the killing," retorted the tall gendarme; "shall I kick him and let him go, citizens?"

The proposition was greeted with applause, Jacquot was duly kicked and dismissed, and, of all the valiant Guillotine Club, not a member made his appearance again that night.

CHAPTER XVII.

MOURAD'S RETURN.

WHILE the President of the Guillotine Club—its only courageous member perhaps—was trying to break the windows of the aristocrats at the Dauphin Club, the two friends, who were of course our two adventurers, were hurrying along the streets to an obscure quarter of Paris where they had lodgings.

"Well," asked Lafangere as they went on, "have you heard any news?"

"Yes. The report of the general's death is false."

"Of course. I never believed it. I have only seen him in one battle, but that man is not made to be killed by the Turks."

"So I told madame."

"Was she frightened?"

"Very much."

"And how did you bear the news?"

"By my channel of communication."

Lafangere laughed.

"You have a good head, St. George."

"Why?"

"Oh, you have a good head."

"But why do you say so?"

"Oh, you have the impudence of the devil. To think that you should have been able to make friends with old Rewbell and make love to his daughter, after we had robbed him, it is too rich for belief. Yet you did it."

"Do you know how?"

"My faith, no. It has always been my idea that a soldier who is over curious is not fit for his position."

"Nevertheless you are curious."

"Well, yes."

"Very good. I have used to gain over this Monsieur Rewbell, two things."

"What are they?"

"Fear and avarice."

"Ah, how do you do it?"

"Simply enough. In the first place this Rewbell is a thief."

"So are the others."

"Granted; but he has a daughter, and it is for her that he steals."

"How does that make a difference?"

"In this way. Monsieur Rewbell was a poor man before the Revolution."

"So was I."

"So were a good many. But he was very poor, and yet had a taste for luxury."

"So have I."

"Let me tell my story. Don't interrupt."

"Go on, my friend. I am all attention."

"In those days Rewbell—he has told me so—saw his wife die of want, and was unable to relieve her. His daughter was only saved from starvation by the Sisters at the Foundling Hospital. He was a beggar when the Revolution arose. Yet he was a man of education."

"Poor devil! I never felt the need of any education since I learned to fence."

"In the Revolution he saw his chance and came to the top. Ever since that he has had a morbid horror of poverty. He pinched and hoarded in the Reign of Terror, and buried his money in the earth. At the fall of Robespierre he brought it out and became a financier. The money he had stolen became a means to make more and put him into a situation where he had control of the treasury."

"Well, this is all matter of report. How does it affect your position with him?"

"You shall hear. Monsieur Rewbell is in that position now that his colleagues on the Directory are scandalized at the public stories about him, and it is settled that he is to go out in the fall of the year. He cannot be re-elected. He is afraid that, after he is a private citizen, inquiries will be made as to how he got his money, and, if so, he can hardly escape trial."

"Very probable," returned Lafangere, dryly.

"In fact, it seems to me that—"

"That what?"

"That this Monsieur Rewbell is an infernal rascal, who ought to be tried."

"Possibly, if France did not suffer under worse evils just now."

"What evils?"

"Treachery, disorder, the enemy on her frontiers, and the only man who can save her away in the East."

"Well, go on. What has that to do with Monsieur Rewbell?"

"This: that if there be a change of government in France—not merely a change of Directors—the man who helps it on will deserve a full pardon for all offenses."

Lafangere started.

"And this Rewbell?"

"Is our fast friend, on the promise of Madame Bonaparte that he shall not be disturbed if the general comes back and the people choose him—as they will—Dictator."

"Heu!"

The *maitre d'armes* uttered a loud whistle, and then burst out:

"I said you had a good head, and you have. But Madame is no fool, neither."

"When a woman loves," observed the creole, sententiously, "she becomes as cunning as a fox to defend those she loves."

"Then it was she who arranged all this fine scheme, was it?"

"She gave me the hint, and I went to Rewbell. I admit I had some trouble, but I had an ally in the house."

"You mean mademoiselle. How did you manage there, St. George?"

The creole suddenly became cold and reserved in his manner.

"I cannot answer that, even to you, comrade. The fact is, I love Mademoiselle Rewbell, and, if the general permits, we shall be wed when he returns."

Lafangere said nothing for a little while as they walked on, but at last he broke out:

"Do you know it is very lucky for the general that he has us two for his friends here?"

"No! three. You forget Mourad."

"True. It is an excellent partnership. Each does something the other cannot do. Now I, for instance, would be out of place in the saloon of the Tuileries, but you seem to be quite at home there in the court. I suppose it is your confounded aristocratic blood—I beg pardon, comrade, no offense. And then you would be nowhere in the Faubourg St. Antoine. They would suspect you in an instant. But I, with my rough way, they tell me everything, and I see one thing, that the wildest of them are getting sick of the feeble and dishonest Directory. Even those asses of the Guillotine Club hate the Government for letting the nobles come back, to live like other people."

"Ay, but what would be the use of our knowing all this, if the general did not know it too?"

"True, and there is where I say the general is a lucky man; for Mourad comes in to make our trio complete. What a lucky thing the Turks took him, ten years ago, so that he can pass for a Turk himself and take passage freely, even in an English ship."

"Yes. To say truth, I am not sure but that Mourad is the most useful member of our trio, Lafangere."

"No, no, one is as good as the other. Together, we can do anything. Alone we are nothing. Hallo, what's that? A light in our window? I wonder who is there?"

They went up to their humble lodging, expecting to find a prying landlady; when they were astonished by the sight of Mourad, in his full Mameluke dress, smoking a chibouque, sitting crosslegged on the floor.

"*Salaam aleikoum*," he said, gravely, and they were so much astonished that Lafangere could only ejaculate:

"But, good heavens, how came you here?"

Mourad made no answer but a silent gesture, which implied that some one was listening, and motioned to them to lock the door of the antechamber and the room in which they were at the time.

Then he said in a low tone:

"Come near. The walls must not hear us."

They came close to him, and he whispered in a low tone:

"Don't start. Don't exclaim. *The general is in France.*"

But for his warning, it is certain that the *maitre d'armes* would have shouted for joy.

As it was, he turned purple in his efforts to restrain himself, and crammed his handkerchief down his throat till he was nearly choked.

St. George, more self-contained in his nature, yet uttered a deep sigh of relief.

"And it is you, *my brother*, that brings the news," he murmured almost inaudibly. "Thank the good God!"

Here Lafangere coughed and spluttered, pulled out the handkerchief and hugged the Mameluke like a bear, repeating:

"In France! In France! It is too good to be true."

St. George, on his part, looked at Mourad very closely and whispered:

"Tell us all about it. How did you get in?"

"I came in at the door, and the *conciierge* was so frightened that he nearly fainted. I pretended to understand no French, and pushed my way past him to your room, and he has been watching outside, under the idea, I suppose, that I am a savage, come to murder every one in the house. I wonder he has not gone out to call the patrol."

"In that case we'd better tranquilize his mind," observed Lafangere, rising. "He may call the patrol now, and we don't want to see any one but ourselves to-night."

He went out to the corridor and found the poor *conciierge* shivering with cold and terror.

"Oh, monsieur, has he hurt you? Who is this barbarian? See what he did."

And the *conciierge* showed him the rail of the balustrade, cloven in half by a clean cut of the Mameluke's saber.

"Had I been in the way he would have taken my head off, I am sure; and yet I only asked him to get out."

Lafangere laughed.

"He did that to frighten you. This is a very respectable Turkish gentleman, a priest of their religion."

"Eh, *mon Dieu!* a priest! If their priests are like that what are their soldiers? And people say our men are fighting these monsters in Egypt, and that they have killed the brave young General Bonaparte, who used to lodge in my house in '95, monsieur. Yes, it is true. He lodged here, with his adjutant, Junot, and many a time have they been without a dinner in those days. But I don't want to see him killed, for the general was always a good man."

"Fear not, my friend," answered Lafangere. "They can't kill General Bonaparte so easily. Now go down-stairs. Our Turkish friend will hurt no one, for he is smoking his pipe."

The *conciierge* went down-stairs, comforted; and Lafangere came back, when Mourad at once began his story:

"You remember when I left you here?"

"Surely. And yet it was not necessary."

"It was best, my friends. You see I am like a fish out of water, here in Paris. I was a French gentleman as a child, and, after that, a soldier under orders in Egypt, and this liberty and equality are strange to me. Besides, there is always a difficulty with us in Paris. There cannot be two St. Georges; and a Mameluke is nowhere among French. It was best for me to return to Egypt and take the general the letters from Madame."

"How did you succeed?"

"To a marvel. I sailed for Naples as a French merchant, and in Naples I took the character of a Turk, going to Smyrna for figs. I was not suspected, and landed at Smyrna, where I procured a horse and arms, and made my way to the general."

"Where did you find him?"

"In Syria, at Hebron; and I gave him the letters and organized for him a company of Mamelukes, that he has added to the Guides. He gave me my commission as Mourad, and from henceforth Adrian St. George vanishes from the official record."

"Well, what next. Were you at Acre?"

"Yes."

"Was he hurt there?"

"No. Who says so?"

"There was a report."

"It was all a lie. But that fellow, Djazzar, foiled us, for we had no siege artillery, and the Turks, backed by that Englishman, Sir Smeeth, whom we left tied up in his own cabin, kept pouring in reinforcements by the sea. We wasted weeks there; but it was to be."

"And did you go back to Egypt?"

"Yes. More Turks, always Turks, came in while we were away, and we had not a single man of reinforcements. At last we had them before us at Aboukir, in the very place where the English took our fleet, and we killed them all or drove them into the sea. Then, when we had beaten all our enemies and any fool could keep Egypt, that devil, Sir Smeeth, he sent us a file of papers, and the general learned how those fools of Directors had lost Italy. That night he made up his mind to escape and he took me with him. He is now at Frejus."

"At Frejus? And how came you here?"

"We touched at Corsica on the way and I took a swift sailing boat from there to France with orders to come to Paris and warn you to be ready. The general was to land at Frejus in two days. He is now there and posting for Paris. The English are all in front of Toulon and Marseilles."

As Mourad finished his story he gave an irrepressible yawn.

"What is it? You are tired?" exclaimed the *maitre d'armes*. "How did you travel?"

"I rode by post and I have had no sleep for three days and nights," answered Mourad quietly. "In fact I am, I think, tired out. Go and tell Madame. I—want—to sleep."

As he spoke his head dropped on his breast and he sunk back on the floor where he fell as fast asleep on the hard boards as if he had been on a down couch.

St. George looked at him pityingly.

"Let us carry him to bed, Lafangere."

They took him to the couch and laid him there, and then the creole said to the Gascon:

"Do you watch over him, while I go to tell Madame."

Lafangere nodded.

"I understand. Our work is only beginning now. We have a great deal to do."

"Yes, and it is important that no one should know of the general's arrival till he is well on his way to Paris. These Directors are not much to fight Austrians, but they will not willingly relinquish their gripe on the throat of the French people."

He took up his cloak, left the house and hurried to the Rue de la Victoire where he knew he would find Madame Bonaparte.

It was nearly midnight, but lights were burning in the house and old Jacques opened the door to him.

The old man accorded a very different welcome to the distinguished looking gentleman from that with which he had greeted the bearded ragamuffin who had sought entrance at Malmaison nearly a year before.

"It is you, Monsieur St. George? Come in. Madame expects you."

"Expects me: how?"

"Madame will tell you."

He ushered the creole into the *salon* where Josephine was quietly reading a book, and she looked up with her charming smile.

"I expected you, monsieur," she said, just as old Jacques had intimated.

"And what made you expect me, madame?" he asked, still puzzled.

"Just after you left me at home I went to the *salon*, intending to retire for the night when I found this on the table."

She showed him a note which he read. It contained only these words:

"St. George will call on you at midnight with good news."

MOURAD.

"Jacques says it was left at the house by a boy, who said it was given him by a Turk who talked French. How is this, and what is your news, monsieur? This Mourad is the third member of your famous trio, is he not? What has he been doing?"

"He has been to Egypt, madame; has seen the general; came back with him to Corsica, and the general is now in France."

The lady started up, her countenance radiant with joy.

"In France! where? Let me fly to him!"

"At Frejus to night, madame; but he is posting to Paris and should be here in three days at the furthest."

"Monsieur St. George, can I ask you a favor, a great favor?"

"Certainly, madame."

"Get me post-horses at once. I must meet the general. I shall not feel safe till I see him once more."

"It shall be done at once, madame."

CHAPTER XVIII.

GETTING NEWS.

PARIS was full of excitement and Oriental fervor. The conqueror of Egypt had come back and had brought a real live Mameluke with him—one Mourad—who dressed in a style Paris had never seen before, was able to cut sheep in half at a single blow, was rumored to have at least fifty wives in Egypt, and yet waited on the general as if he had been his valet.

Wherever the general went this gorgeous Mameluke was in attendance giving a certain Oriental splendor to every thing around him and reducing to insignificance the most splendid liveries of the Directory.

There was no limit to the popularity of General Bonaparte, who went everywhere and was lionized in every corner of Paris as the conqueror of Egypt, who had come back to save France from the Austrians.

Madame Bonaparte was no longer snubbed or politely ignored at the Directory Balls, but had a circle of admirers wherever she went, while all the general's friends were high in place and favor.

Murat, who had come from Egypt on his chief's staff, was Governor of Paris, Lucien Bonaparte the general's brother had been elect-

ed President of the deputies and the new Directors who had come into office were said to be all friendly to Bonaparte, while Monsieur Rewbell, who had gone out, had become President of the Council of the Ancients.

And yet, underneath all the feasting and shouting in Paris over the return of the hero of Egypt, there was a great deal of jealousy and heart-burning, the deeper because it dared not show itself openly.

The old Red Republicans, now a feeble minority, distrusted the new man because he was not one of a crowd but indisputably one by himself.

The Royalists, who trusted to foreign aid to put the Bourbons back on the throne of France, feared Bonaparte, because they knew that he was certain to beat all the foreign armies that could be brought into France. The feeble Directory had played into their hands, but the master was certain to spoil all their nice little plans.

It was in the midst of these conflicts of feeling that St. George and Lafangere, one day, met in the Place de la Concorde.

Both were dressed as peaceful citizens and had no trace of the soldier in their appearance.

"Well," observed the Gascon, "I have been through the Faubourg St. Antoine, and the people are in doubt. What have you found among the 'Whites'?"

"The 'Whites' are in doubt too, but there is a party in favor of trying the general, on account of Madame."

"Indeed? Why?"

"Because she belongs to the old noblesse and has a wonderful influence over the general. They are going to try and bribe him!"

"Bribe him? With what?"

"With the post of Constable of France, if he will head a Royalist movement."

Lafangere burst out laughing.

"A fine plan truly to give him that which those weak fools have not the power to grant in any event. The people would never stand a king of France again."

"So I think, but there is no harm in letting them think the other way."

"Why not?"

"Because we want friends, not foes, and every friend gained helps us."

The Gascon looked dissatisfied.

"I don't like treating with these 'Whites.' They are a lot of old women and worth nothing one way or the other. I am for the Republic, with Bonaparte for its head, because he will make us respected, and I am weary of seeing the tricolor dragged under the feet of these Austrians."

"So am I. But I have more news than that."

"What is it? Has Mademoiselle Claire found out anything?"

"No. But Mourad has."

"Mourad? How?"

"You know he cannot understand a word of French since he came to Paris."

Lafangere laughed heartily.

"Yes. He plays it well."

"Yet the general sends him everywhere with messages."

"I have noticed that. Why does he do it?"

"Simple enough. On every letter are written directions on the outside, and the rascal carries a paper entreating all to help the bearer, a Turk, to deliver his message. Most of these letters are to Directors, and Mourad has to wait for an answer."

"I see, and they talk before him."

"Of course. No one fears to talk French before a Turk. So Mourad hears things."

"And what has he heard lately?"

St. George looked around and lowered his voice.

"They are going to try and arrest the general."

Lafangere started.

"What for? They dare not. The people would rise to rescue him."

"That is true, unless they can find a good pretext to declare him a traitor plotting against the liberty of France."

"Yes. That would be a bad charge. Is it that which they make?"

"I don't know yet, and I require your help to find out."

"You shall have it, of course."

"But it will be necessary to assume a disguise, and to abuse the general. Can you do that?"

"I can do anything when we are together. But where is Mourad, and what has he really found out? Tell me all."

"Listen. Last night Mourad took a letter from the general to the five Directors who were in council. It was a mere nothing about the defenses of Paris, and had Murat sent it, the messenger would have had to wait in the hall. But you know they are very polite to the general, and Mourad, having the reputation of stolidity, was admitted to deliver his letter."

"Who were there?"

"All five: Gohier, Moulins, Barras, Sieyes and Roger Ducos. Barras read the letter and threw it on the table, saying: 'Bah! a mere foolery of that hypocrite, Bonaparte. One comfort—he won't trouble us long,' and then he and the

rest laughed, while Gohier pretended to be shocked, and observed: "For shame, gentlemen; I have invited the general to dinner to-morrow evening." Then they all laughed again, and Barras said with a sneer: "You have read in history of the fox who invited the goose to a banquet." That was all, for it suddenly seemed to strike them that Mourad was listening, and Barras told him there was no answer.

"Did he go out?"

"Of course not. He understands no French, so Barras had to take him by the arm and point to the door. Then he understood and went."

"And from all this you conclude?"

"That there is a plot to arrest the general at dinner at Gohier's to-night."

Lafangere nodded his head.

"I see. Very well. We will be there."

"No need of that."

"Why not?"

"Because the general will decline the little invitation at the very last moment."

"Then what are we to do?"

"I will tell you to-night. Meet me at the Bridge of Arcola when the clock strikes seven. It is dark at that time. Put on citizen's clothes, but have a sword, pistols and a cloak to cover it all. Bring also a mask."

"Diable! are we going to turn burglars?"

"Perhaps, in the interest of France. You will not fail me?"

"Of course not. But I must admit I don't like this mysterious business in the dark. I'd much rather face a man boldly and let carte and tierce settle the business for us."

"My friend, there is a time for all things. How many duels have you fought since you came to Paris?"

"This year—let me see—"

The Gascon seemed to be engaged in some abstruse calculation, counting on his fingers. At last he said:

"Forty-seven with the 'Whites,' but only forty-five had any blood in them. I disarmed the other two."

"Very well, then. Rest satisfied. To-night you will have perhaps all the fighting you want, but it will be with any sort of weapon that comes handiest."

"But there will be fighting in any event?"

"Assuredly."

"That is all right. I will come at seven. Now I will take a stroll through the market to hear what the fishwomen have to say about the general. *Au revoir.*"

He strolled leisurely away, and St. George muttered to himself:

"Assuredly we three can go anywhere and do anything."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BRIDGE OF ARCOLA.

A cold fog had been creeping up over the city of Paris all day from the south-west, bringing the salt sea spume from the Bay of Biscay; and the night set in with a drizzle and mist that made everything intensely dark.

And the lamps of Paris in those days were not much good.

Gas had not been invented, and whale oil did its duty after a sickly fashion.

Moreover there were not many oil lamps and those they had swung from chains in the middle of the narrow streets, crooked, paved with slippery cobble-stones, with an open kennel in the middle, which was gutter and sewer in one.

The Paris of 1799 was very like the Paris of four centuries before, a mediæval city, picturesque, dirty, and just the place for murder and robbery at night.

There were no sewers yet, and the only broad streets were on the Boulevards, so that barricades were as easily erected as they had been in the Reign of Terror.

Under a swinging lamp in a narrow street that led down to the Seine were gathered several men, muffled in long cloaks, and wearing three-cornered hats, with the front flap let down to hide the face.

One of them looked up at the sickly gleam of the lantern, and said with a smothered laugh:

"Do you know, when I last saw that lamp it had a man swinging under it by his neck, kicking like a mule?"

"When was that, Vidocq?" asked another.

"Parbleu, in '93, the people's year. Ah, we had fine times then, better than we have now a good deal."

"I don't complain of these times," broke in a third in a deep bass growl. "They are good enough if we can keep them, and if that infernal Corsican is not made head of the government. I was in '93 as well as the rest of you. In fact, I never enjoyed myself fully till that year. But we have good pickings now."

The men seemed to be waiting for some one, and talking to pass away the time.

Presently Vidocq observed:

"Does any one know where we are to go to-night? I received my orders to wait here till—"

"Till the clock strikes seven. Then to the Bridge of Liberty," said the growling man.

"The Bridge of Arcola," corrected one of the men. "They have changed the name."

"I shall call it the old name," growled the

other. "What do I know of your Arcolas, Casse Tete?"

"Nothing, Gros Pierre, nothing. I acquit you of all knowledge of honorable warfare."

And Casse Tete laughed sneeringly.

"I know enough to rip out your heart if you sneer at me," quoth Gros Pierre in a passion, when Vidocq cried:

"Patience, comrade, patience. Never quarrel when two are in the same boat, or both may go to the bottom. We shall have work enough to-night without fighting each other. Hark! There's the clock."

The deep tones of the clock of Notre Dame, followed by those from a dozen other churches and public buildings, rung out the hour of seven, and the whole party moved down the street to the Bridge of Arcola, where they found three men waiting for them, while a fourth had just halted in the cabriolet, and was speaking in a low voice.

The group from the side street, headed by Vidocq advanced, and the leader hailed the man in the cab in the same guarded tones in which all their conversation seemed to be carried on that night:

"Holla! citizen, what are you doing out so late in the rain?"

"There is no rain to one who wears the right shield," answered the man in the cab.

"And what shield do you prefer?"

"The shield of liberty."

"For my part I wear three."

"What are they, citizen?"

"Liberty, equality and — you know the other?"

"Fraternity. It is well. Have you the private word of the night?"

"I have."

"Whisper it then."

Vidocq went up to the cab and whispered to the man, who at once answered:

"Correct. Follow me."

He was whipping up his horse when Vidocq asked:

"Who are these others? I did not know we were to have strangers in this."

"They are not strangers. They come by the orders of Monsieur Barras, and have his signature to the papers."

"Well," grumbled Gros Pierre, "for all that, we seven are enough, and we want no others to share in the reward."

The other three men, who had been standing a little apart listening, now came forward, and one of them said, with a strong accent of Gascony:

"We are not here for any reward, you fool, but to show you how to do the trick in the right way."

"Ay," corroborated the man in the cabriolet, "you are going on a dangerous errand; for the man you seek is a soldier and armed. Moreover, he has a man sleeping across his door every night, with a saber that cuts a person in half at a blow."

Gros Pierre laughed.

"Bah! tell that story to children. Even Madame Guillotine contents herself by chopping off a head, but as for cutting men in half, that is all fable."

"It is your place to obey orders, not to ask questions and criticise," cried the man in the cabriolet, angrily. "Do you wish to decline the job? If so, say so, and I will go on."

"No, no, no," answered Vidocq, soothingly. "Do not be so hasty, Monsieur Bottot—"

The man in the cabriolet started.

"How? You know me?"

"Of course. Every one knows the handsome secretary of Monsieur Barras, who, people say, furnishes brains for the Directory."

Bottot—for it was that vain youth—could not avoid a pleased accent in his voice as he whipped up his horse and said:

"Come on then. We are losing time."

The seven men from the side street and the three from the bridge went on after the cabriolet, but they kept in two groups, the seven following the three.

The three exchanged a whisper, and one of them fell back into the other group and said in a tone of familiarity:

"Good-evening, Monsieur Vidocq. It is a nice place, this Paris, nowadays, for gentlemen of our profession."

Vidocq cast a suspicious glance at him.

"Gentlemen of our profession? You don't belong to our crowd?"

"How do you know that? I know you well enough, and, in fact, have dined with you."

"Where?" asked Vidocq, curtly.

"In the forests of Auvergne, a year ago. You wanted us to join you then, but we had other business on hand. Now the case is very different. You see we've had to come to it at last. Pride and empty pockets are old foes."

Vidocq looked at him doubtfully.

"I don't remember you."

"Possibly. We three looked different then."

"How did you look?"

"We were in rags and had marched from Marseilles on raw chestnuts."

"Holla! You don't mean it! Are you those three jolly fellows? And what have you been doing all the time?"

"Oh, we've filled our pockets. By the by, how much are you promised for to-night?"

"More than we shall get, my little man, if I don't mistake our job."

"Indeed, and what do you know of the job?"

"What do you know?" asked Vidocq, seeming to become suspicious again.

"Only that we are expected to follow this little man in front, to receive our orders from Monsieur Barras in person, and there to enter the service of the State by arresting some person who will be pointed out to us in the street."

Vidocq touched the other on the arm, and they fell back in the rear of the rest, still following the cabriolet, which was driving at a foot pace.

"Look here, my friend—what's your name?"

"Gascon."

"Well, Gascon, have you any idea who this person is, that is to be arrested?"

"No. Have you?"

"Do you mean that?"

"Mean what?"

"That you do not know who it is?"

"Certainly I do not."

"Well, I do."

"And who is it?"

Vidocq looked round, fell back further, and whispered in the other's ear:

"General Bonaparte!"

The Gascon started—or feigned to start.

"Impossible. They would not dare."

"Oh, they won't risk anything. It is we who run the risk. Have you a mask?"

"Yes. That was the order."

"I know it, and so with ours. Now, you know, Government officers, making a legal arrest, don't need masks."

"Just what I think, Monsieur Vidocq."

And therefore I have come to this conclusion, that, if we succeed in carrying off this unknown man, whom I suspect of being General Bonaparte, it will be only as an experiment, of which this rascally Barras will reap the advantage, while we shall run all the risk."

"Monsieur Vidocq, you talk like a man of sense; but what say your comrades?"

Vidocq shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, they are blockheads, only fit to follow. In confidence, Monsieur Gascon, I have had serious thoughts of late of turning honest man. It is so distressing to be compelled to do all the thinking for these men who cannot see an inch before their noses. I am tired of it."

Gascon cast a curious glance at the robber, but said nothing for several minutes, during which they plodded along through the mud. At last he asked:

"What is your opinion of the masks then?"

"Simply that if we fail we can be disavowed as a band of assassins. That's all."

"To be frank, I think so too. Why should we do all this, Vidocq, to hurt a man who never harmed us?"

"Oh, well, the reward is handsome. A hundred thousand francs is not to be picked up every night, Gascon."

Gascon nodded his head and said no more.

Presently the cabriolet stopped in rear of the Luxembourg and Bottot said:

"Go in yonder by the straight path to the small door in the east wing. Knock four times and give the servant the secret word. He will take you up-stairs to Monsieur Barras. I go in the other way."

He drove off and Gascon found time to whisper to his companions:

"The reward is a hundred thousand, and Vidocq is getting afraid. If we can find another shaky one, we can risk it."

His companions nodded and they went on to the little door, where Vidocq knocked, gave the word, and was admitted into a low, dark corridor, evidently a servants' entrance.

"Come after me. There are twenty-nine steps on the stairs, and one turn to the right in the corridor above," said the porter, in a gruff way, as if he did not like his guests, and they followed him through the darkness, till a light, under a door showed them they were approaching their journey's end.

The porter knocked at the door and ushered them into a large room furnished splendidly, with a fire burning on the hearth.

There was no one in it.

"Wait here till Monsieur comes, and don't talk," said the porter.

Then he vanished.

Now the seven men began to look curiously at the three, by the light of the lamp, as they had not before had an opportunity to inspect them in the street.

Gros Pierre was especially curious, and peered into their faces in such an insolent way that one of them asked:

"Will you know me again, friend? It's a pity I have no mark like you to pick me out of a crowd by. I apologize for it."

Gros Pierre turned crimson at the allusion to the brand on his forehead, and growled fiercely:

"I'd have you know that I paid for that brand in '93 with twelve inches of cold steel in the bowels of St. George the aristocrat. Keep a civil tongue or you may get as much."

The man he addressed was a dark and very

handsome fellow, and he eyed Gros Pierre in a singular way, saying:

"So you are the man, are you? Well, I shall know you again."

Gros Pierre returned his stare with interest, and his countenance clouded.

He looked quickly from the dark man to his neighbor who resembled him very much, but had features rather sharper, and drew back among his comrades, muttering:

"How like! How accursedly like!"

Further conversation was cut off by the entrance of a haughty, sarcastic-looking person, in full court dress, who came out of a recess, concealed by a curtain, advanced with a rapid step toward them and said brusquely:

"Well, where are you? How many are there? Are you ready to undertake the job or not? Who's your leader?"

The dark man drew back among the rest and pointed to Vidocq.

"There's our captain, monsieur. He will treat for us all."

There was something in the air of authority of the sarcastic gentleman that seemed to quell all the ruffians of the party. Even Gros Pierre stood gaping at him.

But Vidocq did not seem to be at all in a humor to be awed, for he stood up boldly.

"Here we are, monsieur, ten of us, ready to go anywhere; but we must know what we are to get."

"Bottot told you. A hundred thousand francs and a free pardon for the past."

"That is not enough, monsieur."

"Not enough?"

The haughty gentleman seemed to be struck dumb by the presumption.

"And how much do you gentlemen of the road consider a fair price, if I may venture to ask," he retorted sarcastically, "if that is not enough?"

"In the first place security that we are not breaking the law again," answered the robber coolly. "Promises are easily made, but money down never lies."

"You want money down?" demanded the gentleman hastily. "You can have half as earnest; but not unless you submit to be followed by a guard, to see you don't cheat me."

"And how are we to know you will not cheat us?" asked Vidocq. "Tell us what we are to do first, and we'll answer."

"You are to go to number 387, Rue de la France," said the gentleman impatiently, when Vidocq interrupted him.

"The house of Monsieur Gohier. I see, Monsieur Barras, what you are at."

Barras—for it was that ambitious and carping Director, who had been the first to raise Bonaparte, and now wished to pull him down again—frowned deeply.

"Don't presume to interrupt me. You will go there. There is a dinner-party to-night, and the person you are to arrest will be there. You will know him by his being followed by a Mameluke, who acts as chasseur to his carriage. He is a small thin man wearing a general's uniform. You will range yourselves on the pavement as he comes out, and put on your masks. The night is dark, and no one will notice you. My secretary will have a close carriage in waiting. You will seize the general as he comes out, place him in the carriage, and drive away."

"Excuse me," observed Vidocq, coolly, "but ten men cannot drive away in one carriage, Monsieur Barras."

"Fool, you don't want to. The ten are to make resistance useless, and to kill the Mameluke if he tries to fight. Shoot him down at once if he draws his saber, or he will hurt some one badly. Three will put the general in the carriage, handcuff him, gag him, and keep him there. One will be on the box with my secretary, who will drive; another two behind. That makes six. The other four will cover the retreat till the carriage is out of sight. It is dark and foggy. There ought to be no sort of trouble. In the side streets put away your masks and disperse. When your work is done come here separately. I shall be in waiting, and will pay you your money to-night—ten thousand francs each. Is that enough?"

Vidocq hesitated, when the dark man cried:

"Accept it, captain. Monsieur Barras is very liberal. Accept it."

Barras smiled like one well pleased, and Vidocq said:

"Very well; if my comrades will take the risk, we will do it. Where shall we go now?"

"Out by the back way. Separate there, and reunite at the house. The carriage will be in waiting for you there."

Vidocq bowed, and the procession filed out of the splendid room into the dark corridor. When they were again in the gardens of the Luxembourg, the leader said:

"Gros Pierre and Casse Tete, you take the first street; Crocasse and Bidet the next; Plomier and Riquet the next. We four will take the other two. Meet at the house."

The robbers dispersed silently, and Vidocq ran his arm familiarly through that of the dark man, saying:

"Come along, brother. I want a word with you on the way."

CHAPTER XX.

VIDOCQ.

THEY went silently along the dark streets. In front Vidocq and St. George; behind them Lafangere and Mourad the Mameluke, the latter dressed in French citizen's clothes and muffled in a cloak, but wearing his terrible scimitar, as always.

Vidocq seemed to be trying to make up his mind to say something, and St. George waited.

Presently the robber said in a confidential way:

"Well, you ought to be very grateful to me."

"Why?" asked St. George, quietly.

"For not exposing you."

"You could not have exposed us."

"Yes, I could. Barras did not know you, yet you have orders signed by him, according to his secretary's story."

Lafangere, who was behind, chuckled.

"He is a deep man, this Vidocq. What an agent of secret police he would make."

St. George smiled slightly. He very rarely laughed; but he seemed to be amused.

"How do you know the secretary is not in the game we play, on our side?"

Vidocq stopped and began to laugh in his turn.

"That idiot? You would not trust him. No. You have forged the orders, and, on my soul, you must be a deep one to do it so well."

"Monsieur Vidocq," observed the creole in the same even tone in which he always spoke, "I think you are a great fool, after all."

"Why? I have not made a mistake."

"Yes, you have, a great one, and one that has lasted for at least ten years; for I don't think you are over thirty."

Vidocq seemed to be struck by this remark.

"I don't understand why you think I am a fool, citizen," he said thoughtfully.

"Because, with your head, you might be something better than a mere robber, with the galleys in prospect as soon as the country becomes settled. You think you could have exposed us to Barras? Do you know who we are?"

"Supporters of Bonaparte. I remember you of old though the others did not."

"And suppose you had exposed us, as you say, to Barras, do you know what would have happened at once?"

"Oh, a fight of course. But we were two to one, you know."

"Precisely; but you are not aware that we were waiting for that very thing, and that we should have beaten you to a certainty."

Vidocq stopped again.

"Oh come, my little man," he exclaimed angrily, "you don't suppose you three could have beaten us? Why, I, myself, would match any one of you, and my men are hard nuts to crack too—old fighters."

"Monsieur Vidocq," pursued the creole, as calmly as before, "you do not know that you are covered now by the muzzles of two pistols; and that, had you said a word to Barras in the saloon, three of you would have fallen at the first fire. We had you picked out, and each of us had his pistol cocked under his cloak."

Vidocq looked astonished.

"I never thought of that. Where did you learn that trick?"

"Never mind: it is a good one, you will admit."

"Yes; but after all, there would still have been four to three."

"And those three masters all. See here. There is an alley yonder, with a lamp. Let us come up there. I will wager you five francs, any one of us three can disarm you at the third pass. Will you try?"

Vidocq looked at him quizzically.

"And what for? I don't care to be made a fool of. But what puzzles me is this; what do you want me to do, and how can you make me break my word to Monsieur Barras? To be sure, all the fat is in the fire, now; but why are you talking to me and trying to make an honest man of me?"

"Because we need your help. You see I am frank, Monsieur Vidocq. I want you to come with us and see General Bonaparte."

Vidocq started violently.

"See General Bonaparte! I see the hero of Arcola! But he would spurn me. And I have just consented to try and kidnap him."

"So much the more reason for you to see him; for he is the only man in France who can give you the assurance of pardon, and a place on the secret police when order is restored in France. You were born to be a detective; for you have fathomed our plans in a moment, when we had deceived Barras and made him sign several orders without looking at them."

Vidocq laid his hand on St. George's arm.

"Did he sign them truly—on honor?"

"He did."

"Who asked him?"

"His secretary."

Vidocq burst out laughing.

"Who is she, who is she?"

"Who is who?"

"The woman that fooled Bottot! No man

could do it so easily. There is a woman in it somewhere. I know it."

St. George smiled; Lafangere chuckled.

"He is a born detective, that Vidocq," said the Gascon. "What a shame he is only a thief! What a shame!"

St. George echoed the sentiment.

"Truly it is a shame; and yet he may be a great man in his line."

Vidocq shook his head.

"No, you don't know anything about it. You are not one of us. Didn't you notice how they all suspected you the moment they saw you? You have not the air of thieves. You can't talk their language. And you don't know what is the penalty—"

He shuddered slightly.

"No, it is impossible. Every thief in France knows me, and were I to turn traitor they would take a horrible revenge."

"You mean they would kill you?"

"Wherever I was seen, without remorse."

"Very well. So shall we, to-night, if you do not at once consent to come with us."

As he spoke the robber heard the click of pistol locks all round him and the sweat started out on his forehead.

He felt all the more afraid, because he was already half-hearted in the cause which he had undertaken.

"Listen," continued the creole in the same even, passionless tone, "you know as well as I that Paris counts a dozen murders a night and that not one of them is ever discovered in these times. We are three to one, and the Seine is at the end of this street. We are, as you have said, of the Bonaparte party, and it is life or death with us to-night. We can foil your plot now by killing you and then setting on the others as they come up in pairs. They suspect nothing. But that is not all we want."

Vidocq wiped away the sweat.

"What do you want then?"

His voice was hoarse and low as he made the inquiry.

St. George took him by the arm and said in a low voice:

"We want to arrest Barras and Gohier."

Vidocq started violently and then remained perfectly silent for a minute wiping away the sweat that gathered on his forehead from time to time and to all appearances thinking intently.

At last he uttered a deep sigh.

"It's a grand scheme! Heavens! You are a master! I am almost tempted to join you, but I am afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Of the others. They heard me take the offer."

"The others must join us."

"They will not do it. At least all will not."

"Who will not?"

"Gros Pierre for one. The man with the brand. He is a violent Red."

"I do not want him," answered St. George quietly. "In fact I am going to kill him this very night."

"Why?"

"Because he is the man who killed my father on the 2d of August."

Vidocq looked at him keenly.

"What! are you an aristocrat?"

"As far from it as can be, but I cannot bear a man boast of killing my father and not revenge his death."

"Then your name is St. George."

"How do you know that?"

"We all know Gros Pierre. He has told the story a hundred times of how he revenged the dishonor of his sister by killing the Marquis of St. George. But that is a family affair. Settle it as you please, citizen. There is one friend you would have among them, however."

"And who is that?"

"Casse Tete. He used to be in the Army of Italy, but deserted since Bonaparte went to Egypt."

"Very good. He will bring the others over. But it is you we want first. Will you join us or not? Remember that France is on the eve of a change and that to-night is the crisis. Tomorrow is the Eighteenth Brumaire and when the sun sets Bonaparte will be master of France—"

"Or dead, citizen."

St. George shrugged his shoulders.

"Or dead. What signifies it? You cannot take him to-night, as you see. The question remains, will you go back to Barras and tell him you have failed, that your plot is discovered, that General Bonaparte has not dined at the house of Director Gohier, and so lose your money, or will you join us and make friends with the ruler of France by delivering him his enemies bound hand and foot?"

Vidocq hesitated.

"You have a confounded way of arguing. Where can I see this General Bonaparte?"

"At once, if you desire it. But—"

"But what?"

"But if I were you I would not come first to him in the attitude of a man who seeks a bargain."

"You are right. Well, suppose I join you, what am I to do?"

"Bring over your companions and obey my orders for to-night."

Vidocq struck his hand into the creole's palm, and said heartily:

"I'll do it. The fact is, you are the only man I have met for ten years who has a head. I'll obey you. Give your orders."

There was something in his tone that gave assurance of his sincerity, and St. George did not hesitate to trust him. As for his friends, they were willing to follow him anywhere. They went along toward the Rue de la France, and as they went Vidocq rapidly sketched out a plan of action.

"You want to arrest Barras and Gohier and serve them as they want to serve Bonaparte, I suppose?"

"That is precisely our object, citizen."

"And you say General Bonaparte will not dine at Gohier's?"

"No. He has sent an excuse at the last, the very last moment."

"Then Barras has not heard of it yet?"

"No, but he will before ten o'clock."

"Then we have no time to lose."

"Certainly not."

"Can't we arrange for a false general to be arrested, so that we can get the reward out of Barras?"

"What do you mean?"

St. George seemed surprised, and Vidocq looked much elated.

"Come, I am not altogether a fool, after all. That never occurred to you. Yet it is the very first thing came into my mind. Casse Tete shall do it."

They hurried on, Vidocq looking very eager and excited, till they saw the house in the Rue de la France, all lit up, with a line of carriages in front, and people staring from the sidewalks at the figures entering the house under the awning.

"There's Bottot," whispered Vidocq, pointing to a carriage on the opposite side of the way drawn up and waiting with a single man on the box. "And yonder are Casse Tete and Gros Pierre in the crowd. The others must be near by. We must get them out. Has the general's message reached Gohier yet?"

"No. As a matter of fact I am to take it myself at eight o'clock, in the character of his staff officer."

"And it is now, what?"

"Very near that time."

"Then you will be late."

"No."

"Why not?"

"I have my uniform under these clothes and the general's carriage is at the end of this line. The dinner is supposed to begin at eight o'clock, but they are always late."

Vidocq ruminated a moment and then struck his forehead.

"I have it. Just the thing. We have ten minutes to do it in. Will you trust me for ten minutes and do just what I say?"

Lafangere and Mourad shook their heads in silent warning, but St. George said:

"Yes, if your scheme is good. What are you going to do?"

Vidocq drew him to one side and said in a whisper of great glee:

"I'm going to the Rue de la Victoire, carriage and all to arrest the general. How is that for a scheme, my friend?"

"It depends."

"On what?"

"On whether Bottot will follow."

"Leave him to me, I'll show you."

The carriages kept moving on to the door of the illuminated mansion, depositing their loads of guests and at the very end of the line was a handsome coach with a pair of grays, a Mameluke riding on the footman's perch behind the body of the carriage.

Vidocq darted over to the carriage waiting on the opposite side of the street and said in a low tone:

"Monsieur Bottot, I want to speak to you."

The blonde secretary of Barras was not yet easy in his role of conspirator and it was a very cold muggy night.

His voice trembled as he whispered back:

"What's the matter? Don't call out my name like that. Come up on the box."

This was just what Vidocq wanted, and he was up in a moment.

"Bonaparte is not in his carriage," he whispered. "It's at the head of the line empty. He is sending an excuse by his servant."

Bottot trembled from head to foot.

"What shall we do? We are lost!"

"Not a bit of it, if you have courage," replied the robber rather contemptuously.

"But what can we do?"

"Why, go to the man's house and arrest him of course. He has no guards. He is nothing but a private citizen now."

Bottot hesitated.

"But you'll have to do it all by yourselves. I only promised to drive the carriage to the Bicetre."

"Oh!" said Vidocq. "Then the prisoner is to go to the Bicetre. Is that it? Are they ready for his reception?"

"Of course they are. I have the order for the Governor, signed by Barras."

"Does it mention the prisoner's name?"

"Of course not; we are not fools enough for that. In case there is a row to-morrow and he is found, it will be all a mistake, but it is my opinion he will not be found."

And Bottot chuckled.

Then he seemed to realize the new difficulty for he asked nervously:

"Well. What shall we do?"

"Come to Bonaparte's house. We will go in and do the business. When we come out you'll have your prisoner."

Bottot nodded.

"All right. I'll drive there."

"And I will bring on the others."

Vidocq jumped down and went over to the crowd, where he whispered to Gros Pierre:

"Come along to the Rue de la Victoire. Our man is there. He has sent an excuse and will not dine here to-night. Tell the rest."

In the mean time St. George sauntered down to the last carriage on the line.

"Hola!" he said in a low tone to the driver on the box. "Is that you, Captain Perrin? I've news."

The coachman, who had retired into the depths of his tall collar, looked suspiciously out:

"Who the devil's that?"

"St. George."

"Oh, indeed. Well?"

"There's no need of going up to the door. You will be wanted at the house, you and Junot."

"All right. Shall we turn round?"

"Not yet. When you see the carriage on the opposite side of the street drive off, follow it at the distance of a street. It is going to the general's house. Have you arms?"

Perrin laughed.

"We are regular arsenals. But it is a most infernal night for plots and a man fresh from Egypt feels the climate more than you fellows who have been home all the time."

At that moment Vidocq strolled past arm in arm with Gros Pierre, and St. George left the carriage and sauntered away with the group of robbers and convicts whom Barras had hired so cleverly to kidnap the hero of Egypt.

They passed along the streets in the drizzling rain and fog and turned into the Rue de la Victoire. As they walked on in groups of twos and threes, one man kept shifting from group to group, exchanging earnest words with one and the other.

That man was Vidocq, and St. George let him work.

As they came near the general's house, Lafangere whispered to the creole:

"Are you sure he will not play us false?"

"Quite sure," was the answer. "You don't know what I have in reserve at the house, but you will see, my friend."

As he spoke they came to the house.

CHAPTER XXI.

MONSIEUR BARRAS.

As they came to the house in the Rue de la Victoire, the rattle of a carriage was heard, and Bottot drove up and halted near by. At the same time the distant rumble of another carriage warned St. George that the general's vehicle with two disguised officers, was coming up.

He hurried to Vidocq.

"Are they ready?" he asked.

"All but Gros Pierre and Crocasse. I have not sounded them, for I know it is no use. But Casse Tete is furious, since he knows who it is that is to be arrested. He is ready for anything."

"Very well. Come into the house."

He went up and knocked at the door, which was opened by old Jacques, who shrunk back at the sight of so many men muffled in cloaks, and was about to slam the door, when St. George said:

"Have no fear, Jacques; we are here as friends."

"Ah, it is you, Monsieur St. Georges," cried the old man, relieved. "On my word, I thought it was some plot of the *sans-culottes* to kidnap the general and madame."

St. George smiled as he stepped in.

"It was, but we have turned the tables. Where is the general?"

"In the *salon*, monsieur. Are all these—gentlemen—to go in?"

The old man was scandalized at the faces of some of the ruffians he saw, but St. George answered tranquilly:

"Yes, all are to enter. Who goes out, is quite another matter."

The door closed, and they entered the hall, where the seven ruffians, except Vidocq, stood, looking as if they hardly knew what to do.

St. George led the way to the door of the *salon*, threw it open and was confronted in a moment by an officer in brilliant uniform, sitting on an ottoman by the door.

This officer started up, laid his hand on his sword and asked fiercely:

"What means all this? Who are you?"

Gros Pierre uttered a cry of amazement, for he saw that the room was lined with soldiers, lying down all round the walls, with their muskets beside them, while General Bonaparte sat at a table, writing by the light of a lamp, with

a sword and a brace of pistols lying on the table before him.

St. George threw back his cloak and answered the officer gayly:

"We are friends, my dear Rapp."

Then the general looked up.

"It is thou, St. George? Well, what is it?"

The soldiers never stirred, but looked on in the apathetic way of men who wait for orders.

St. George advanced to the table, and whispered to his beloved chief:

"I have fathomed the plot, and, if you, general, will give me the authority, I will have Barras and Gohier prisoners before the generals come to breakfast."

Bonaparte looked at him sharply.

"What authority do you need?"

"An order from yourself, directing the commanders of all guards and prisons to obey me, in the service of France for the safety of the Republic."

"You are modest, monsieur. You wish me to repose implicit confidence in you."

"Have I deserved it so far, general?"

The creole's tone was cold and injured.

The general allowed one of his rare smiles to light up his pale face.

"You have. But to arrest these men is a measure that requires military law and a guard. How can you penetrate the Luxembourg, for instance, to take Barras?"

"With a guard I cannot. With the men I have, I can do it."

The general nodded.

"Aha! I see. You have bought them. Well, I will ratify your bargain to-morrow, if you can do what you say. Is that enough?"

"I shall be more than satisfied, general."

The general wrote rapidly a few moments, and then handed St. George two slips of paper.

"See if those are enough."

St. George scanned them eagerly.

The first ran thus:

"For the safety of the Republic, imperiled by traitors, I order all officers and soldiers within the limits of Paris to obey the wishes of Citizen Georges, who has power to make all necessary arrests."

"BONAPARTE,

"General commanding."

The second was as follows:

"I promise to ratify any engagements made in my name by the Chevalier St. George."

"BONAPARTE."

St. George bowed low and his voice trembled as he said in a low tone:

"You repose this confidence in me, general: You shall see I do not abuse it."

The general cast a glance at the dark group by the door and asked:

"Who are your friends, St. George? Have you been scouring the galleys for allies?"

The creole bowed again.

"The galleys were scoured, general, but not by me. Moreover, I have found there a jewel hidden away."

"And who is your jewel?"

The tall man in front there, with the large nose. His name is Vidocq."

"Vidocq, Vidocq! He is a robber. I heard of him three years ago in Auvergne."

"The same man, general, but for all that he is a jewel, for he knows every thief in France and is willing and anxious to join the secret police."

The flashing eyes of Bonaparte rested on the harsh features of Vidocq with interest.

"He looks like a man of parts," he said.

"Well, St. George, I trust your discretion. When your work is done report here."

The creole bowed and retired, motioning his friends to follow him.

As they were going out Bonaparte called:

"Stop. I want my Mameluke back. I am lost without Mourad."

St. George stopped at the door.

"I am sorry, general, but I need him to-night worse than you do."

Bonaparte shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I suppose I must submit. You people are all the same. You seem to think I am of no importance to any one."

St. George made no answer save to sweep out Mourad who hesitated whether to follow or not, and then to close the door.

"I want you all," he said pointedly. "Come on."

They followed him into the street, when Gros Pierre, who had been perfectly quiet in the house, broke out with a furious oath.

"What is all this? There is some hocus-pocus going on, and I am not in it. Where is the man we are to arrest?"

"You shall find him if you will follow us," answered Vidocq instantly. "You're a fool, Gros Pierre. What do you care who is arrested or not arrested, so long as you get your money?"

"There is some accursed aristocrat's plot going on here," retorted Gros Pierre, "and I am left out with Crocasse. Well, I am going to spoil your sport for you."

"How?" asked a voice suddenly, and the figure of Mourad the Mameluke stepped up near Gros Pierre.

They could hardly see him in the darkness but they heard the clink of steel as he spoke.

Gros Pierre turned on him savagely.
 "How! I'll show you! By killing you as I killed St. George, you sneaking aristocrat!"
 He reached to his belt for a pistol, but it had become fastened for some cause, and Mourad cried out:

"The second boast. Die then!"
 In the same instant the bystanders saw something flash between the two; and a cry of inexpressible horror burst from Vidocq, who was nearest, as the huge frame of the galley slave fell on the pavement.

"*Mon Dieu! Il l'a coupé en deux!*" [My God! He has cut him in two.]

The Mameluke quietly stepped back and muttered something in Arabic to St. George, who at once started into the midst of the group.

"He has cut in two the man who said the feat was a fable. Let him lie there. Now, only a word. The man Barras sent you to arrest is in that house. It is General Bonaparte, the hero of Egypt. You see from what I have saved you. Now comes the question. Do you want to earn from Bonaparte twice the money promised by Barras?"

"Of course we do," cried Vidocq, readily.

"What do you say, Casse Tete?"
 "I say that any man who follows General Bonaparte is certain to find victory," answered Casse Tete, with enthusiasm. "I am ready to do what this gentleman wishes."

"And so am I," echoed Riquet.

"Bidet and Plomier, are you ready to earn twenty thousand francs apiece?" asked Vidocq, turning to them.

"I am ready to try," replied Bidet, curtly.

"And I haven't seen so much money for a long time," observed Plomier. "Count me in."

St. George stepped to the side of the only man who had not spoken, and asked:

"What says our friend, Crocasse? Is he ready to earn twenty thousand francs or another blow of our Mameluke's saber? He awaits to know, close behind you."

Crocasse turned, and, even in the darkness, saw the rolling eyes of Mourad, as the young Mameluke stood, with his saber drawn back near his waist, as if to lend all the force of his body to a back-handed blow.

"Don't stir," observed St. George, warningly. "If you move he will cut, and I warn you that saber will cut a hair."

"Mercy!" muttered Crocasse, thoroughly awed by the imminent peril in which he stood. "I will do anything you wish."

"Take him between you, Riquet and Casse Tete," commanded Vidocq, "and then come on, for we have no time to lose."

He came up close to St. George.

"Well, captain, have I kept faith so far with you?" he asked, confidentially.

"You have. Can we trust Crocasse?"

"With the others on each side of him. It's just as well your friend cut Gros Pierre in half. I thought these Mamelukes didn't understand any French?"

"This one does a little. You know he's General Bonaparte's personal attendant."

They were hurrying on through the streets as they conversed, making the best of their way to the Luxembourg.

Suddenly Vidocq stopped.

"By heavens, I forgot! Where is Bottot? Has no one seen him?"

He uttered an impatient oath.

"How could I be such a fool? He must have seen us come out, and have suspected something. I don't remember seeing him anywhere as we came out."

Lafangere, who was close behind, began to laugh.

"Not so sharp as I thought him, this Vidocq. Bottot is taken care of by our own people."

"How?" asked Vidocq, wonderingly.

"By the people on the general's carriage. Our friend is now snug within the walls of the *salle de la police* of the garrison, under General Murat's orders."

"How do you know?"

"I know St. George, and I saw him speak to Captain Perrin, who was on the box. Perrin is not the man to let Bottot fool him."

Vidocq took off his hat in the midst of all the rain, and bowed profoundly.

"Monsieur St. George, your head is better than mine, and I count myself no fool. You forget nothing."

Presently they came to the garden of the Palace of Luxembourg, and St. George said to Vidocq:

"Now it is your turn. I don't feel able to coax the man outside. Can you do it?"

Vidocq laughed.

"Oh, that's nothing. Certainly. Have your carriage ready, and I'll get Monsieur Barras out here in five minutes."

"Do you want any one with you?"

"Yourself, if you are not needed out here."

"No. Lafangere, take command out here. You can see the carriage following us. Now, Monsieur Vidocq, I am at your orders."

The robber entered the gardens of the palace, closely followed by the creole, and they knocked at the door where they had before obtained their admission.

The porter came and gruffly demanded:

"Well, what do you want?"

"The safety of the Republic," replied Vidocq.

"The word is all right. You'll find Monsieur Barras up-stairs, where you went before, and he's pacing up and down, looking as anxious as—"

Crack!

Vidocq was standing close by him, and of a sudden raised his hand and dealt the other what seemed to be a gentle tap on the nape of the neck.

Yet under that tap the porter suddenly fell forward on his face in the passage, and lay as still as if he had been dead.

"He's safe for the present," observed the robber, coolly. "Now, Monsieur St. George, I hope you'll not object to standing outside while I go in to Barras. You can see and hear all, but I don't want him to see you."

"A good arrangement."

They stole up-stairs and Vidocq knocked at the door of Barras's gorgeous cabinet, while St. George hid himself behind an angle of the wall. The anxious Director came to the door instantly and threw it open.

"Well," he demanded, as soon as he saw Vidocq, "have you got him?"

"Yes, your excellency. That is—"

"What? What?"

Barras seemed fairly devoured with his anxiety as he asked:

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, that is, if we have bagged the right man. You know, Monsieur Barras, your description could only apply, as I thought, to one man in the city of Paris. If that is the man, we have him."

Barras looked frowningly at him, gnawing his lip and appearing to hesitate.

"What man have you got?" he asked at last.

"General Bonaparte. I hope we've not made a mistake, monsieur."

Barras looked intensely relieved, and a smile broke out all over his face.

"No, no, there is no mistake. You have done exactly right. You want the money! Come in, and I will give it to you at once."

Vidocq fidgeted.

"It is not that, monsieur; I am quite ready to trust to monsieur's honor. But I must tell monsieur that there is a little trouble among the men outside."

"Trouble! of what kind?"

"One of them, monsieur, Casse Tete by name, used to serve with the general in Italy, and he recognized him at the time of the arrest. He has begun to tell the men that there is some mistake, that the general is a good patriot; and has worked on the others so that they would not let Monsieur Bottot drive to the Bicetre, but insisted on coming here at once."

"Then where is General Bonaparte now?" asked Barras, with a pale face.

"Outside at the back gate, in a close carriage muffled, gagged and bound."

"And what do you want me to do?"

"To go out to them and tell them with your own lips that they have the right man, and that General Bonaparte is a traitor to the French republic. That will satisfy them, but nothing short of it."

Barras drew a deep breath.

"Is that all? Certainly. I will go."

He was going out, when Vidocq coughed.

"Excuse me, monsieur, but I think that it would aid very much in convincing the men if you took out with you—"

He coughed a second time, delicately, but with a volume of meaning.

"Take with me what?"

"The money, monsieur."

"True, true. You are a sharp fellow. Help yourself first, and help me carry the rest."

St. George heard the chinking of gold, and, peeping round the corner, saw Vidocq stuffing his pockets with money, with a grin of ineffable satisfaction on his face, while Barras was gloomily watching, like a man who is playing a desperate game of chance and finds the luck going against him.

"Well, are you ready?" he asked, at last.

"Certainly, monsieur. Shall I precede or follow you?" asked Vidocq, politely. "It is very astonishing, Monsieur Barras, how different are the feelings of a man who has nothing but a few sous in his pocket, as I had when I entered this place, and the same man when he has five gold rouleaus of ten thousand francs, in each side of his pantaloons."

"I don't need your aphorisms," replied Barras, sternly. "You forget to whom you speak."

Vidocq took off his hat and bowed in a way indicating the most profound respect.

"I hope not, monsieur. I salute the setting sun as it sheds on me the last glory of its beams. Shall I show you the way?"

Barras nodded.

"Go on. You seem to be an original; but as long as you have taken General Bonaparte I am quite satisfied to let you have a little freedom for to-night."

Vidocq preceded him down the stairs, and St. George waited till they were at the door before he stole after.

He heard Barras say:

"Ugh! What a night. I must get my hat."

"By no means. Let monsieur take my cloak. It has a hood and will cover monsieur from the impertinent elements, that have no more respect for a Director of France than a street boy."

And in a moment Vidocq had taken off his cloak, and was wrapping it tenderly round the velvet coat of the Director.

"Now, monsieur, forward. Take care of the step. Now is our time."

As he said the last words he saw St. George behind Barras. In another minute a second cloak was flung over the cheated Director's head, and both men grasped him with all their strength.

CHAPTER XXII.

OTHER PLOTTERS.

MONSIEUR BARRAS was so surprised and alarmed by the sudden onslaught made on him, that he could make no effectual resistance, though he kicked and struggled desperately.

But he was in the hands of two powerful, wiry men, one of whom had him by the head wrapped up in a cloak, while the other held his legs and hustled him along like a bag of meal to the carriage, where they were about to bundle him in, when St. George said:

"No, no. Give him a chance to yield with due dignity. Hold him!"

He drew off the smothering cloak and said sternly to the unhappy Director:

"A cry for help will insure your death. You are arrested by order of General Bonaparte. Are you ready to go quietly, or must we tie and gag you, as you wished done to Bonaparte?"

Barras, pale with his desperate struggle, yet retained dignity enough to say:

"I surrender to force. Where are you about to take me?"

"To the guard-house of the garrison. You will be released as soon as France is tranquil. Do you give your parole not to attempt to escape on the way, or must we secure you?"

"I will not attempt to escape. General Bonaparte might at least spare me, who made him what he is, the indignity of bonds," said Barras, bitterly.

St. George made no answer to him, but turned to Lafangere.

"You and Mourad go inside with him. Who is that on the box?"

"Perrin," answered the coachman, from behind his huge collar. "Is this another rabbit for the spit?"

Lafangere laughed and took Barras into the carriage, while St. George and Vidocq turned away with the other men, as the coach drove off into the darkness.

"Go to Gobier's and wait," called out St. George as the vehicle disappeared, and they could hear the voice of Perrin, shouting back to them:

"One at a time. I will be there."

"Well, gentlemen," said St. George to the six ruffians by whom he was surrounded, "so far so good. You have earned ten thousand francs apiece, and Monsieur Vidocq has it in his pocket. The other ten thousand will be much easier."

Vidocq fidgeted and whispered:

"What made you tell them that?"

"Leave all to me. You shall lose nothing," was the answer of the creole. "Pay out the money to the other five."

Vidocq, with an air of resignation, pulled out the rouleaus of gold from his pockets and was about to give one to each of his comrades, when St. George interrupted:

"No, on second thought we will not pay in advance, or anything at all till the job is over. You might leave me in the lurch. I did this to try you. Which of you is desirous of being paid off and going home at once without further trouble?"

"I am," growled Crocasse; but the rest were silent; and St. George answered:

"You know you'll only get half the money. The job is only half done."

"Ten thousand francs is enough for me," the ruffian growled in a surly tone. "Pay me and let me go."

"Monsieur Vidocq," said the creole politely, "Oblige me with ten thousand francs for this gentleman, and Monsieur Casse Tete will then remember that Crocasse is one of the enemy who has left our little band in the time of danger."

Casse Tete nodded silently and stole behind Crocasse, who was eagerly awaiting the money to be given him by St. George.

"Now, Monsieur Crocasse," continued the creole in the same tone, "I am about to do a very foolish thing with my eyes open. I am about to trust you with ten thousand francs and your liberty, which I know you will use to sound the tocsin and raise the Sections on us to spoil our plans for to-night. Here is your money, my friend, but if any zealous friend of General Bonaparte should knock you on the head to save you from the folly you are contemplating it will be your own fault for leaving your comrades in the time of danger."

Crocasse listened impatiently till he got hold of his little roll of gold when he answered with a coarse laugh:

"That's my look-out. Good-by."

Crack!

In the very same place where Vidocq had struck the porter, Casse Tete struck Crocasse—on the nape of the neck, and with the same weapon, a pistol butt.

Without a groan or struggle Crocasse fell on his face, and Casse Tete was stooping to take back the money, when St. George said:

"No, let him keep what he has earned. By the time he comes to his senses we shall be safe. Come along, men. For to-night at least you are not robbers, but men trying to save France from the Austrians. It remains to be seen which will bring you most profit, the role of a robber or an honest patriot. Forward in the name of France."

The five remaining robbers seemed to be much struck by this appeal to their honor, and as they hurried forward through the rain, the creole heard Casse Tete mutter to Riquet:

"I tell you things will be different now, and we may as well be on the winning side if it pays as well as to-night!"

Vidocq hurried on with the leader before the rest, and found time to whisper to St. George:

"It is all right, captain. The rest will stick. But are we enough?"

"Enough for what is left to do. I can manage that alone if necessary, but I wish to give your men a chance to prove they are not unworthy of the name of Frenchmen."

As the creole had expected, Vidocq dropped back among his friends to report this little speech, and from that moment St. George felt safe from any further treachery.

In due time they arrived at the Rue de la France, and found it empty of carriages, though the mansion of Monsieur Gohier was still lighted up.

The dinner is in progress," said the creole to Vidocq. "Now, as soon as our friends come, we are ready to begin operations."

They walked up and down the street in the sleet and mist in pairs at a distance from each other. Vidocq kept with St. George.

Presently he observed in a tone of concern:

"We are not alone. There are some other men watching the same house."

"Of course. They are the men who think they are going to catch the general."

"But Barras sent us to do that."

"You see how much he trusted you. He was going to watch you after all."

They counted the watchers in the street, and found they were about a dozen men who kept themselves muffled up and seemed desirous of avoiding observation.

Most of them turned away into side streets when they were approached, but followed the seven confederates at a distance as soon as their backs were turned.

"On my soul," muttered Vidocq, "this is growing interesting. I must tell the rest that they may not be caught in a trap after all."

He went away for this purpose, and St. George, in spite of his assumption of indifference, began to feel uneasy.

"Here are twelve to seven. Are they friends or foes?" he thought. "If foes, our work is not over for to-night."

With this thought in his mind he lounged near one of the strangers and managed to come on him face to face.

"Good-evening, citizen," said St. George.

The man addressed nodded his head very slightly and passed on, muttering something the creole could not catch.

St. George cocked a pistol under his cloak and followed the other.

"As he had expected, the sound of his footsteps caused the man to turn and exclaim:

"What do you want with me?"

"Simply to find who you are and why you are pacing up and down this street."

The man gave a short, uneasy laugh.

"I thought the streets were free under your republic, citizen."

"Aha! I see, you are a royalist."

The stranger started violently.

"What do you mean?"

"That I am an agent of the police, citizen, and that we have a hundred men waiting in the houses round here for the signal of a pistol-shot. Shall I fire it?"

The stranger began to tremble.

"Monsieur, I swear to you—"

"There! I said you were a royalist. Off your guard you say monsieur. I think it is my duty to arrest you."

The stranger started back and threw the flap of his cloak aside.

"Try it at your peril. I am armed and desperate."

St. George remained impassive.

"You are foolish. If you fire it will bring out the police in a minute. Come, I don't want to hurt you. Between us two this republic is a miserable farce and our pay is insufficient to support us. You can take a hint, monsieur?"

The stranger dropped his cloak again and came closer.

"You can earn a good deal of money by keeping your mouth shut."

"Of course. How much?"

"How much do you want?"

"Ten thousand francs."

"You shall have it."

"But I must know what you're after."

"That is our business. All I want is to be left alone."

"Very good, monsieur, but I must tell you that I cannot keep all my men quiet without knowing what you want us to do."

"I want you to keep your eyes and ears shut with regard to all that takes place outside that house which is lighted up."

"Oh! you mean Monsieur Gohier's?"

"Hush! yes. There is no need of mentioning names. Hark! here comes the carriage."

In fact they could hear the rumbling of a carriage coming down the street.

St. George, completely mystified, resolved to wait further developments before he did anything further. He suspected the carriage now approaching to be that sent from the general's house, but it was evident that this stranger, whom he knew to be a royalist, expected another carriage.

Here was another plot going on, and the creole had no idea of what it could be about.

The approaching carriage dashed into the Rue de la France and St. George saw it had bay horses. It was not the vehicle he himself was expecting.

While he wondered and hesitated the stranger came close to him and whispered:

"Here, take this and keep quiet. It is only a visit that will not hurt you at all. Gohier is with us and you will see a change in a few months when our friends will not be sorry if they helped us. What is your name, my friend?"

"George Lafangere," answered the creole, at a venture, feeling that the other had passed him a roll of money. "What is yours?"

The carriage had drawn up at the house now and the stranger answered hastily:

"Never mind. When the king has his own again call on his Minister of Justice. I'll remember your name. Good-night."

He hurried off toward the house where St. George could see by the light of the lamps two dark groups on each side of the awning.

At the opposite side of the street he saw his own men, watching, in a third group.

They, too, were mystified by the other carriage and the strangers, so much stronger in numbers than themselves.

The creole crossed the street and found Vidocq looking on with a smile on his harsh features.

"Have you found out who they are, captain?" he asked, knowingly.

"Yes. Have you?"

"Certainly. They are Chouans; but what puzzles me is, what they are doing there?"

"Look," whispered Casse Tete, "some one descends to the street."

They could see under the awning by the light of the lamps, a white-headed gentleman in the crimson velvet court-dress of a Director of France descending the steps arm in arm with a second person who wore the simple black velvet of a gentleman in the evening.

The watchers at the opposite side of the street stole forward, when in a moment the dark groups by the side of the awning broke up and a dozen men confronted them in the roadway.

"Not a step further here," said a low menacing voice. "We'll not be taken alive. Keep silence and go your own ways and we will not hurt you, but you must not go near the carriage."

"Eh, *parbleu*, we don't want to hurt the carriage, my friend," said Vidocq, jeeringly.

"It's plain enough some person is in it who does not wish to be known. Come, talk reason. We are poor men."

At this moment the carriage door slammed and they heard the voice of the old gentleman say aloud:

"Farewell, monseigneur. Good fortune attend you in your undertaking."

The Chouan leader uttered a deep curse.

"Drive on," he shouted to the driver, and then he turned on St. George's party as the coach dashed off at a furious pace.

"You know who it is, but he will be out of your reach before you can alarm Paris. Now which will you do: fight or take money?"

His tone was that of a desperate man, and the clicking of pistol-locks followed on both sides as he spoke.

Vidocq laughed aloud:

"You fool, I told you we were poor men. You can't take a hint."

"Take the money, then," cried the Chouan, in a tone of disgust, and he threw Vidocq a heavy purse. "All we ask is five minutes."

"Take it," cried Vidocq, and away went the Chouans, running down the street just as the rumble of wheels was heard on the other side, and the two gray horses hove in sight.

Vidocq turned hurriedly to St. George:

"Now is our time, captain," he whispered.

"The fates are friendly to-night."

St. George nodded.

"Come on, men. Don't stop to touch that money," he cried, sharply.

He saw the figure of the gray-headed Director slowly reascending the steps and noticed that there were no servants around.

The seven dashed across the street, headed by the creole and Vidocq, and overtook the old man at the steps.

"Monsieur Gohier," said St. George, as he laid his hand on the old man's shoulder, "we are here. When is the general to come out?"

Gohier looked round surprised.

"Why? Did you not know he had sent an excuse? I thought Barras had attended to that."

"He has, monsieur, and here is the carriage. The one which just drove away—what was it?"

"What do you mean? That is none of your business," answered Gohier, tremulously.

"It is the business of every citizen of the republic to protect it from Chouan plots," replied the creole, tightening his gripe. "You have come down alone. You dared not let even your servants hear you call that man by a title forbidden by the laws. Monsieur Gohier, you are my prisoner, in the name of the republic."

Monsieur Gohier trembled violently. He was a very different man from Barras.

"My dear friend, I assure you there was no harm in all this. The Reign of Terror is over, and monseigneur only wished to—"

He stopped, unable to proceed. St. George prompted him.

"Monseigneur only wished to sound the Directory on the possibility of a restoration."

"I told him it was impossible," urged Gohier pitifully. "I sent him away. Do not expose me, citizen. Barras is equally guilty."

"Barras is a prisoner and so are you," answered the creole gravely. "You will enter this carriage at once quietly, or we shall kill you on the spot as a traitor to the republic."

As he spoke, Vidocq, Casse Tete and the rest forced the unhappy Gohier into the carriage, the old man not daring to protest, for the door of his house was closed by his own order and his servants saw nothing. St. George stopped a moment to speak to Vidocq.

"You have kept your word. Can you depend on mine now?"

"I must whether I will or no," was the very philosophical reply.

"I shall see if you do. Pay the men and come to the general's house to-morrow morning at daylight. I will see that you do not lose by the operation."

Vidocq screwed up his face. "Well, it must be done. Till to-morrow."

The carriage drove off.

On the box was Ferrin, captain of grenadiers, disguised as a coachman. Inside were Gohier, Lafangere and Mourad with St. George. Lafangere burst into a chuckle.

"We have done it at last. I said we three could go anywhere and do anything. Do you know what has just happened?"

"What?" asked Gohier, nervously, for he seemed to think the remark was addressed to himself.

"Sieyes and Ducos have come to General Bonaparte's house bringing with them Moulin's resignation and to-morrow the general will have authority to secure the safety of the republic at any hazard."

Sieyes, Ducos, and Moulins were the other three Directors.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ORDER.

THE morning of the 18th Brumaire, 1799, dawned clear and cold with a biting east wind that froze the mud in the streets; and the house of General Bonaparte in the Rue de la Victoire presented an animated scene, without and within.

The street was crowded with handsomely caparisoned horses, held by orderlies, the house full of generals and colonels, come to take breakfast with the conqueror of Egypt.

Among these imposing personages were two officers in the simple uniform of lieutenants, who attracted little attention and were snubbed by most of the generals.

"One wore the green and red chasseur dress of the Guides, the other a dragoon uniform. They kept apart from the rest at a side table, and did not pretend to mingle with their superiors. The only person who spoke to them was Madame Bonaparte, who was always gracious to everybody."

The general of all generals appeared to be in very good spirits, laughed and joked with his comrades in arms, and was constantly attended by a gorgeous Mameluke, whom he was said to have brought from Egypt, and who was reported to understand no French, for the general directed him by signs and a few Arabic words he had picked up in the East.

The breakfast was full of fun and jollity; for there were so many guests that they could not sit down to table, and had to eat standing or sitting, wherever they happened to be, so that there was no formality about the meeting.

In the midst of the buzz of conversation a carriage drove up, and the Directors, Sieyes and Ducos were announced.

They were greeted with profound respect by the Corsican general, and taken to the head of a table that had been kept vacant for them.

Sieyes had been a priest, and had a cunning face; Ducos looked like a retired butcher. As

they took their seats, the ex-abbe said to Bonaparte:

"The motion prevailed. Send a confidential man to Lucien at once, that it may be announced publicly."

The general looked round, and his eye fell on the two lieutenants at the side table, who seemed to be there on purpose to catch his glance. He nodded, and the lieutenant of Guides started up and came to him in a moment.

"Go to the Luxembourg; report to the President of the Council of Ancients, and he will give you an order," said Bonaparte, in a low voice. "It will be necessary to be prepared for violence on the way back. You understand?"

The lieutenant saluted.

"Can I take my comrades, general?"

The general made a grimace.

"You want Mourad? Whom am I to have in his place?"

"Roustan, general, another Mameluke, who is now down-stairs."

The general gave him a searching look.

"Does he understand French?"

"The same as Mourad, general, and he has the further recommendation of knowing every thief in Paris. It is the man I told you of."

The tone of their conversation had been low and guarded, and it was in the same tone that the general answered:

"If you are responsible, send him up."

The lieutenant bowed and departed. He dropped a few words in Arabic to Mourad, who followed him, as also the lieutenant of dragoons.

Soon after they had left the room a tall, raw-boned man, with harsh features and very piercing black eyes, entered the room and took up his place behind Bonaparte's chair, dressed as a Mameluke.

"Hallo!" observed Sieyes, "have you two heathens in your employ, general?"

"Yes. This one is Roustan. He understands no French at all. I have to converse with him in Arabic altogether, or by signs."

The tall Mameluke stood stolidly at the back of the chair as if he heard nothing; but it was the eyes of Vidocq that scanned the generals round him as coolly as if he had been among them all his life.

Meantime the two lieutenants and Mourad mounted horses held out in the street, and dashed off, full speed, to the Luxembourg.

The people had gathered in groups on the sidewalk; business seemed to be suspended, and all Paris had the appearance of a city on the eve of some important event.

The 18th Brumaire and the 2d December are the same day, both fateful to France.

"It looks like a revolution," said Lafangere as they rode along; "we are in a critical position, if the people should declare against us to-day."

"Revolutions are only possible when the people are weary of one form of rule, and ready to try anything for a change," was the tranquil answer of St. George. "See how they look at us. They are only curious, yet they know a change comes to-day. They would scowl and murmur, if they did not wish it."

They came to the Luxembourg, which they found surrounded with troops, and were halted by an officer who commanded at the great doorway.

St. George and Lafangere had dismounted while Mourad held the horses.

"You cannot enter, gentlemen. The Council of Ancients is in session," said the officer.

"We come from General Bonaparte to receive the orders of his brother, who is the president of the council," replied the creole.

"That is different. Pass in."

They traversed the stately halls and came to the Legislative Chamber, where a great tumult seemed to be raging within.

There was no sentry at the door, and, as they entered, they perceived the president on the rostrum pounding with his gavel for order.

As soon as they were perceived silence ensued, and St. George saluted the president.

"General Bonaparte desires to announce by us that he is at the service of the Republic, to restore order, in obedience to the commands of the Council of Ancients."

The grave men in long robes, who had been making such a noise, stared at these two young men, so different from themselves, with curiosity; but the president responded:

"General Bonaparte has the confidence of the council, and we have issued an order assigning him to the supreme command of the troops of the nation. We were just about to send it by our courier, but fear he will be treated with violence in the street. Do you feel confident to escort him back?"

"If the President will intrust me with the order," replied St. George, "I will deliver it to the general, dead or alive, but if the people see the uniform of the courier I cannot answer for the consequences, till the general has assumed command."

There were murmurs all round the chamber.

"No, no; the dignity of the council."

"Our courier must go."

"Very well, Monsieur President, if you are willing to run the risk, we take it."

The murmurs of gratified assent were universal; for the Council of Ancients had become sticklers for forms in the moment when they were submitting to their new master!

The courier came forward with a huge yellow envelope in his belt. He was a little, withered old man, in a magnificent uniform of red velvet and gold and looked as if he could hardly ride a horse, much less fight.

"These officers will act as your escort, and you will deliver this letter forthwith to General Bonaparte," said the President.

The courier bowed, and replied in a cracked, trembling voice:

"I obey, your excellency."

Then he hobbled from the room, and, once outside, turned to St. George.

"It will be a terrible time. The Red Clubs have sworn to have my life if I try to deliver the order; but I am ready to shed my blood for the Council of Ancients."

Lafangere laughed reassuringly.

"The Red Clubs are no great fighters. We will manage to take you in safely."

Out in front of the palace they found a white horse, magnificently caparisoned; and the courier observed proudly:

"That is Bucephalus, my charger. He has been in the service of the state twenty years now; for he carried the king's courier in the old times."

The friends exchanged glances. It was clear they did not admire the virtues of the white steed of the State in an emergency like the present. St. George whispered:

"We must take him between us, and if they try to stop us, we'll drive Bucephalus on, if we have to kill him."

Lafangere nodded, and they helped the old man climb up into his saddle, when Bucephalus trotted slowly out of the gate, with the step of an ancient elephant.

The two officers vaulted on their horses; passed a few words to Mourad, and then set out on their hazardous journey to the Rue de la Victoire.

Had they been alone they would have feared nothing; but as soon as the crowd outside saw the velvet coat of the decrepit courier, they began to run together and shout:

"The order! The order!"

Here came a cry from another quarter:

"Vive Bonaparte!"

It was taken up by part of the crowd, when another part roared savagely:

"A bas Bonaparte! Hors la loi!" [Down with Bonaparte! Outlaw him!]

Then some one in the rear threw a stone at the old man, and instantly rose a great confusion of yells, in the midst of which people came running from the side streets, and, as it seemed, in a moment, the whole place was blocked with a crowd; yelling to each other, swaying to and fro, and not one man seeming to know exactly what was the matter out of the whole assembly.

The old courier looked on the crowd and shook his gray head as he said:

"It is impossible to get through. I must return and report the fact to the council."

St. George and Lafangere drew their swords and took hold of the reins of Bucephalus on either side, while Mourad the Mameluke dashed in his spurs and made his horse plunge among the people so they cleared a space in front of the old courier.

St. George exerted his voice to its utmost to be heard over the tumult.

"Citizens of the Republic! The nation is in peril, and Bonaparte alone can save us. Make way for the order which saves France from the Austrians and kings!"

The last words struck the right chord and there was a shrill yell of "Vive Bonaparte!" amid which a long lane was cleared as if by magic in the street.

"No time to lose! Forward!" shouted the creole and away went the trio.

Mourad the Mameluke dashed along in front, swinging his long saber and uttering furious yells, while Lafangere and St. George, the former pricking Bucephalus with the point of his sword at every few steps, made that aged steed renew his youth and fly down the street like a colt.

On they went for several squares, the cheers following them like waves of the sea, till all at once a mob of Red Caps surged in from a side street, and a shout arose of:

"Vive la Republique! A bas Bonaparte!"

"It's that villain, Crocasse, with the Red Clubs," cried Lafangere excitedly. "Now we must fight. You ought to have finished him last night, St. George."

As he spoke the Red Caps rushed across the passage; and Crocasse, with a long pike in his hand, roared:

"We have you at last, traitors. Death to the Turks!"

The other Red Caps had armed themselves in the hap-hazard style of the Revolution, with butcher's cleavers, knives, pikes, forks, sickles; anything they could find or hide. Regular weapons had been banished from the houses of Paris after the Revolt of the Sections, four years before.

Mourad turned round in his saddle and looked back at St. George:

"Remember me, brother," he said simply. "There cannot be two St. Georges any longer, and it is fit the last marquis should die like his father."

Lafangere heard him and so did St. George; but they had no idea what he meant till they saw him charge into the mob of Red Caps, all alone, and begin to cut and slash on all sides like a demon incarnate, while a broad lane opened itself though the crowd for them to pass.

St. George knew well that a Paris mob, that has once tasted blood, is dangerous, and he turned Bucephalus into the lane and sped on to the Rue de la Victoire, leaving Mourad behind to fight the Red Cap Club alone.

When they got to the house he and Lafangere tore the old courier off his horse and rushed him into the mansion and up-stairs into the middle of the throng of generals, till they came in front of Bonaparte.

Here St. George saluted hastily, and, without giving the old courier time to utter a word, whisked the big envelope out of his belt and handed it to the general, saying:

"We had to cut our way through, general, and Mourad is behind yet. Can we have leave to rescue him?"

Bonaparte nodded impatiently even as he tore open the big yellow paper, so full of fate to France, containing as it did the order nominating him general-in-chief and announcing the abdication of the Directory.

"Ay, ay, take Roustan," he said.

Then, as they were leaving the room, he rose and read to the excited generals:

"18th Brumaire, in the year VIII of the Republic, one and indivisible."

"In view of the intense political excitement prevailing in Paris, and to secure to the sworn representatives of the people the freedom of deliberation menaced by a mob of unruly spirits, and, further, in view of the fact that the Directors, Barras, Moulins and Gohier, have basely resigned their posts, it has been resolved by the Council of Ancients, that their future meetings shall take place in the palace of St. Cloud, and that General Napoleon Bonaparte be given the supreme command of the troops of the nation and directed to preserve the peace of the Republic at any hazard."

"In the name of the Republic,

"LUCIEN BONAPARTE,

"President of the Council."

A mighty shout shook the room, and the officers, as by one motion, flashed out their swords and shouted:

"Vive Bonaparte!"

None cried, "Vive la Republique." Already they began to see the difference.

The young leader, with flashing eye, thrust the paper in his breast, and cried out, as he snatched up his hat:

"To horse, gentlemen! I answer for the safety of France! Forward!"

There was a thunder of feet, a clank of spurs and steel scabbards on the stairs, a waving of plumes, and a glitter of gold bullion, as the future marshals, dukes and kings of Europe rushed down to the street after their young chief, each eager to be first in the saddle.

They heard a wild cheering in the street far away, but thought little of it, and felt no fear of any possible mob; for generals, staff, orderlies and all, made a body of four or five hundred mounted men, all well armed. The mere imposing presence of such a body would overawe any crowd in Christendom.

Away they went with a clatter and rattle of accouterments, followed by the cheers of the people till they dashed into the broad avenue that led to the Luxembourg, and saw the whole place black with people.

Bonaparte said a word to Murat, his adjutant, who rode beside him, and out rode all the orderlies in a compact line, with their sabers drawn, shouting:

"Clear the way!"

The crowd shrunk back on all sides in terror and admiration, as the glittering body of generals and staff officers dashed by, and the shouts of "Vive Bonaparte!" became louder than ever.

In front of all the glittering epaulets and gold lacings, in his simple dark green coat, three-cornered hat, white breeches and top-boots, the least attractive figure in the crowd, rode the victor of Arcola and the Pyramids, on a gray Arab, his pale face eager and full of life, as he swept on to his destiny, looking straight before him.

He never even noticed, so great was his abstraction, a group of horsemen in the crowd at the side of the street, just dismounting round a space cleared among the people.

His eyes were fixed on the palace of the Luxembourg, his busy head already dreaming of the future glories in store for the darling of victory. He never looked to the side of the street, where the last effort of the wild men of '93 had spent itself in vain opposition to the Decrees of Fate.

Yet there, at the side of the street, lay the first of many men who were to perish that Bonaparte might wear the crown of Imperial France; his young life thrown away in blind devotion to an idea, in the chivalrous generosity

of self-sacrifice that only a soldier's creed can teach.

For there in a little cleared space, at which people gazed with shuddering exclamations of pity, lay five men, gashed and half drowned in a red pool of blood, and in the midst of them, riddled with pikes and knives, beside his dead horse, lay the corpse of Mourad the Mameluke, with St. George kneeling by it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TWO HEROES.

It was indeed Mourad, the Mameluke, dead in the midst of his foes; and Lafangere was weeping openly above him, while St. George knelt by the body, looking down on it as if petrified with grief and murmuring:

"My brother! my brother!"

Vidocq, in his Mameluke dress, had drawn his sabre and kept the crowd back as the procession of generals rode by. He looked up at the Corsican man of fate as he passed and muttered:

"This is the first victim; but it will not be the last for many a year, or I mistake that face."

"Oh, my comrade!" sobbed Lafangere, laying his hand on St. George's shoulder, "our league is broken. We three together could have scattered them like chaff, and now he is gone, the best of us all."

St. George bowed his head on his hands.

"Yes," he groaned, "the best of us all, the best of us all! He gave his life, he, the true St. George, that I might remain, I, the accident, the tainted blood, the man who let him perish, that I might obey my orders."

The clatter of hoofs and the jingle of horse equipments was louder than ever, as a squadron of cuirassiers trotted by, closing the procession, and the crowd swept off after them to gaze at the soldiers and shout:

"Vive Bonaparte!"

Lafangere heard the shout, and said, in a bitter tone of voice:

"Ay, shout for the rising sun! He goes on to his fate, and we are left alone. He never looked this way, St. George. Not once."

The creole rose to his feet and glanced round him.

The crowds had dispersed. Red Caps and all had vanished. The last spark of the spirit of '93 had perished in the abortive effort of a single club, led by a thief, to stop three resolute men, bearing an order that had changed the fate of France for fifteen years.

"Ay, we are left alone," he said, "but France is safe, and my brother died to save her from the kings of Europe. Let us carry him away, Lafangere."

"Where?" asked the *maitre d'armes* in a desolate tone of voice.

"To the house whence we came. He died for the general, and the general must see to it that he rests in honor."

"But it will shock Madame Bonaparte."

"Madame Bonaparte is a soldier's wife. She will respect the body of one slain in her husband's cause."

They took up the body reverentially, and made a litter of the pikes that had slain him, on which they laid Mourad in his gorgeous Oriental raiment; stained with blood, but still beautiful to see.

They bore him to that famous house in the Rue de la Victoire, now grown too small for the man who held in his hands the destinies of France.

They took him into the court-yard where so many horses had pawed the ground that fateful morning, and found no one but old Jacques, sauntering about, looking melancholy.

"Eh, mon Dieu, messieurs!" he cried aghast; "what is this? Is there another revolution? Who has been killed?"

"The Revolution is accomplished," said Vidocq brusquely. "This is the solitary victim on our side, but he was a good man, for he killed five before they finished him. It is Mourad, the real Mameluke, you see. I am only a sham one, who has taken his place for a day."

"Where is Madame Bonaparte?" asked St. George of the old servant.

"Madame is within, and only Mademoiselle Rewbell is with her. She is greatly distressed monsieur, with fears for the general. If you can give her any news it will be a godsend for her."

"I will go," said St. George, gravely; and he went up-stairs to the *salon*, where he found Madame and Claire sitting on a sofa, weeping together.

Josephine started up.

"Oh, Monsieur St. George! How good of you! You have come back to tell us news. Is he safe? How did the people receive him? *Mon Dieu!* I am half wild with fears. It is so different to the risk of a battle. These terrible civil quarrels! Tell me all!"

"Madame," replied the creole, gravely, "I saw the general near the Luxembourg, surrounded with troops, while the people followed in crowds, shouting: 'Vive Bonaparte!' The Revolution is accomplished. It is only a question of firmness now. The danger was past when the order arrived. From henceforth General Bonaparte can dispose of France as he pleases,

for the Government has abdicated in his favor, and the army adores him."

Josephine clasped her hands.

"Oh, how thankful I am! And was there no fighting, monsieur?"

"None, after the general had mounted his horse, madame."

Claire Rewbell had been watching him anxiously, and now she pulled Madame Bonaparte's sleeve.

"What is it, my dear?" asked the lady.

"Something has happened. How pale he looks!" whispered the girl.

Madame Bonaparte turned anxiously to the creole.

"You say no fighting occurred after the general mounted his horse. But you brought the order. Had you any trouble? Were you hurt?"

"No, madame, I am unhurt."

"But some one else is hurt?"

"Not hurt, madame; but one of our league of three has given his life for France."

His tone was grave and solemn.

"Who?" asked the lady anxiously.

"My brother, madam."

Both ladies uttered exclamations.

"Your brother! I did not know—"

"To you he was only Mourad the Mameluke, but in truth he was the last Marquis of St. George. My mother, as you know, madame, and as it is my duty to tell mademoiselle now, that I may not sail under false colors, was a slave of the mixed blood. My brother, as a child, coming to France, was seized by Barbary pirates and sold in Egypt, where he became a Mameluke. He escaped to our lines before the battle of the Pyramids; but refused to take his true name, for the sake of me, his illegitimate brother. To enable me to obey my orders, he faced the mob alone, and the last Marquis of St. George now lies dead in your court-yard, while, through his death, your husband, madame, has become the master of France."

Josephine had listened to him silently, with her eyes full of tears. When he had finished, she answered gravely:

"Monsieur St. George, you are worthy to be his brother, and he to be yours. Remain here. It is fitting that I, who owe him so much, should pay the last tribute of respect to the memory of a hero."

She moved away from the room, and St. George remained buried in gloomy thought, till he was roused by the sound of a stifled sob from Claire Rewbell.

He looked uneasily at her, but as she continued to sob he approached her.

"Why do you weep, mademoiselle?" he asked gently.

"For you. You must have loved him so much, and it is terrible to lose one that is loved. Ah, Emil, you must have loved him better than all the world."

"He was my brother."

"Yes, yes, I say so. And you loved him so that you have forgotten that there are others in the world, who would die to console you."

The creole looked at her sadly.

"No one loves me enough to console me, Claire. I have a curse in my blood, the black drop that can never be effaced."

"God gave it to you, and God gives no curse, Emil, save for crime. You say no one will love you. Ah, you are wrong, so wrong!"

St. George made a step toward her, his face convulsed with emotion.

"What! spite of all I have said, is it possible that one can love me?"

"Ah, Emil, you do not know women."

"I know one woman, for whom I could even forget my dead brother in time."

"There is no need of that, Emil. We can mourn him together."

A few short years have passed away, and General Bonaparte has become the Emperor, Napoleon the First.

Conspicuous among the brilliant figures that surrounded the emperor at his coronation was a tall, handsome officer, in the uniform of a general of cavalry.

"Who is that officer?" whispered one lady to another. "To my thinking he is better looking than Marshal Murat."

"Yes," rejoined the second, "Murat, they say, puts his hair in papers every night, but any one can see those are natural curls that cluster round the brow of that man."

"But who is he?"

"My faith, I don't know. Let us ask this gentleman."

"But he is a stranger. It would not be the correct thing."

"Don't you see he has the badge of the secret police on him? It is his business to tell, for he knows every one."

They addressed a tall, dark man, with very sharp eyes, which wandered over the brilliant throng incessantly.

"Monsieur, can you tell us the name of that handsome officer, with the lady dressed in blue and white satin?"

"Certainly, madame, that is St. George, with his wife."

"St. George. Is he not a great fencer? I have heard my husband speak of him."

"Yes, madame. He has invented a peculiar parry of his own, which they call the St. George, after him."

As the tall woman moved away, the lady said to her companion:

"Do you know who that was?"

"No. Who?"

"That is Vidocq, the great detective. They say he used to be a robber."

"And why is he here?"

"My faith, I suppose on the look-out for his old friends."

As Vidocq moved through the crowd he nodded here and there. He seemed to know every one, and every one to know him.

"It's a strange thing," remarked a man, dressed in ultra fashionable garments, to his friend, as Vidocq passed them with a smile and bow, "that a man like that, with such a face and figure, should be able to assume a disguise, but I've seen him become a dozen different men in as many days, and on my honor I did not know him in any character."

"Monsieur Vidocq must be quite a great man, Lafangere. He seems to have thrived well under the emperor. By the by I've heard that you had a good chance in the army. Why did you not take it? You also might be a general."

"My faith, no. I am, and always shall be, only a *maitre d'armes*. They cannot rise. In the army I should be a lieutenant still, drilling stupid conscripts. As a private individual, I am the best master in Paris, and people crowd to me at ten francs a lesson. I am well content, my friend, for I do not have to face those foolish bullets, that have no more respect for a master than a recruit."

The cathedral is empty, the emperor has driven to the Tuileries.

St. George and his wife enter their own carriage, and the general says to the driver:

"To the cemetery of Pere la Chaise."

They alight at the gates and the pair pass through the shady walks till they come to an altar of white marble.

The lady lays on the altar a wreath of immortelles and says to her husband:

"Do you know what I was thinking of during the coronation?"

"Perhaps the same as I."

"And what thought you?"

"That my brother's body should be interred at the foot of the throne."

"Ah, yes, Emil, it is true, for it was the first step on which General Bonaparte set his foot when he ascended the throne of France. But you also did your duty."

"We three, Claire, we three. But Mourad was the best of us all."

THE END.

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